



## BALANCING THE CANDLE ON THE RIGHT PATH

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### Abstract

M. Fethullah Gülen is a globally important historical figure for three reasons: (1) his postmodernist re-appropriation of the ancient theoretical roots of Turkish Islām [*Türk Müslümanlığı*]; (2) his practical call that this re-appropriation become the property of Turks at every level of understanding; and (3) his vision that such re-appropriation would not only re-vitalize Turkish communities, but also enhance the dialogue of the world's great faiths, and, as all civilizations are founded on faith, enhance the prospects for peace in the world: *pace* Huntington, not a clash, but an alliance of civilizations. Gülen's importance flows from a threefold development. (1) He builds on foundations from Maturidi to Said-i Nursi, affording ample exegesis of Qu'ranic prescriptions for moral duty: following the straight path: *al-sirāt al-mustaqīm*. (2) He insists (a) theoretically, Islām is the *umma wasat* [ummeten vasatan], "the 'middle way' of absolute balance," e.g., between rationalism and mysticism, and (b) practically, that individuals make choices according to situations, requiring free use of intelligence (v. Abant Platform, July 1998), and its keen development, esp. in natural and social sciences. (3) Given the polymorphism of consciousness and the fragmentation of culture, he recognizes that we proceed like the blind men in Rumi's elephant parable: we need a candle; but it won't be ideological; Gülen refuses to have religion's role be decided by the political; instead, he insists on the absolute Transcendence of the middle way, of the need for us to keep our balance on the way, and for us to understand that balance in terms of our own intrinsic development, our "candle," be it, e.g., in common sense, medicine, or physics. That balanced candle is crucial. Gülen's potential contribution to co-existence will be assured only when it is recognized, philosophically and theologically, as an intrinsic truth of human development. This is the gravamen of our inquiry.

### 1. Introduction

M. Fethullah Gülen is a globally important historical figure for three reasons: (1) his postmodernist re-appropriation of the ancient theoretical roots of Turkish Islām [*Türk Müslümanlığı*]; (2) his practical call that this re-appropriation become the property of Turks at every level of understanding; and (3) his vision that such re-appropriation would not only re-vitalize Turkish communities, but also enhance the dialogue of the world's great faiths, and, as all civilizations are founded on faith, enhance the prospects for peace in the world: *pace* Huntington, not a clash, but an alliance of civilizations.

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*That balanced candle is crucial.* Gülen's potential contribution to co-existence will be assured only when it is recognized, philosophically and theologically, as an intrinsic truth of human development. This is the gravamen of our inquiry.

Unlike the substantive reviews of the work and life of M. Fethullah Gülen, this essay is merely a propaedeutic. We seek, not to introduce Gülen to a Western audience, but to alert sagacious Western readers to the need to meet him.

Our sketch unfolds in two parts. In part one (Sections I and II), we aim to remind the secularist and materialist Western readers that, contrary to Chairman Mao's *obiter dictum*, "Power flows from the barrel of a gun" (a dictum followed by a number of adventurers in the Middle East), power can have an entirely invisible and indeed, unimaginable, source, a source as near at hand as our own horizons of inquiry, and yet as far beyond us as the ways of God. In part two (Sections III and IV), we very briefly recall the severe context and several of the accomplishments of M. Fethullah Gülen, the prophetic voice from eastern Anatolia, who has done more than any one else within the House of Islām to remind both East and West that this power is ours only upon submission to the will of God, a submission that is by no means arbitrary, but rather that demands the full exercise of our reason as well as our faith. It is the measure of Gülen's accomplishment that he has not only created the greatest civil movement in the history of the Ottoman lands, Arabic and Turkish alike, but that he has also reminded the West, ever so quietly, of the primacy of charity. The House of Service or *Dar al-Hizmet* may become, not only the glory of Turkey, but an inspiration to the world.

## 2. "My chcemy Boga!"<sup>81</sup>

Skeptics of conferences on peaceful co-existence and the practical impact of inter-faith dialogue ignore not only the power of belief (reasoned and loving reliance on the Unseen), but a major lesson of Late Modernity.

A. Doubting Thomases<sup>82</sup> arch a skeptical eyebrow when they hear of international conferences on peaceful co-existence that are predicated on inter-faith dialogue. Their rebuttal is brief: Assisi.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> This is the opening of a very popular Polish hymn, sung in utter defiance of the Communist regime, to this effect: We want God in our families, in our churches, in our schools. More succinctly: "Potrzebujemy Boga!" – "We want God!"



<sup>82</sup> The term, once re-appropriated, points us toward a Muslim cognate and thus to a neglected concurrence of heart-and-mind values among the Ahl al-Kitab, the People of the Book, with the House of Islām.

“Doubting Thomas” derives from the Gospels’ last earthly encounter with the Risen Jesus, John 20:19-29, at 27-29. Jesus had previously appeared to the disciples when Thomas was not present; they had recounted His visit in wonder, but Thomas had refused to believe them unless he could physically examine the wounds from the Crucifixion. A week later, the disciples re-assembled, with Thomas, and Jesus returned, first wishing them Shalom/Salām.

“27 Then He told Thomas, ‘Reach out your finger and examine My hands; reach out your hand and put it into My side. And do not persist in your disbelief, but become a believer.’ 28 Thomas answered with the words, ‘My Lord and my God!’ 29 Jesus told him,

‘You have believed because you have seen Me.

Happy [are] those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

(Raymond Brown, tr., Anchor Bible) Fundamentalists would construe the text as one demanding “blind faith.” Yet, nowhere in the Gospels (cf. the verbal Injil) does Jesus speak capriciously. Here, too, His rebuke of Thomas is not based on a failure of Thomas to believe everything he hears, but rather, very precisely, on his failure to consider closely, i.e., to judge himself, the judgment of his most esteemed contemporaries: his fellow disciples. Thomas elevates the evidence of his senses above his judgment – though we all of us know how often our unaided senses can mislead us. It is only when Thomas’s senses are confronted with the physical truth that he utters the great profession of faith, “My Lord and my God!”

Sharpening the point, Thomas is depicted in St. John’s Gospel as one of the most discerning and courageous of the disciples. His failure at this instant reflects how we can all of us, when confronted in heart-and-mind with a divine challenge, seek refuge in the senses: in denial of the Transcendent. Perhaps Caravaggio caught this internal division of ours best. In a Baroque masterpiece, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, c.1601-02 (original in the Neues Palais, Sanssouci, Potsdam; close copy by Caravaggio, authenticated 2006, from l’Église Saint-Antoine, Loches, Touraine), we are struck first by Thomas’s own division: even as Christ guides Thomas’s hand into His chest wound, Thomas himself looks away, as though he has just come to realize his failure. He has tested the Lord, rather than himself.

This is the most copied work of Caravaggio’s. Thomas stands in for all of us; and lest the point be missed, he is accompanied by two decidedly ordinary-looking disciples, equally entranced by the evidence of the senses. So ordinary are the three disciples, that their clothes are old; Thomas’s shirt is splitting at the shoulder. These are no privileged professionals; these are the salt of the earth.

Twenty centuries of commentary on St. John’s story are best summed up in Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Un. Pr., 2005, 2007).

Once we re-appropriate to ourselves the call to test, not the Lord, but ourselves, in every walk of life, then we can rise to the convergence of heart and mind values with Islām. In the Qur’ān, as in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, the infinite nature of God’s Transcendence demands extraordinary concentration and judgment; for most often, God will be described in terms that are immanent, familiar, even familial. As in the Old and New Testaments, so too there are verses in the Qur’ān that have recourse to anthropomorphic metaphors in describing our direct contact with Allāh, e.g., 20:5 (“the Most Gracious rose over the Throne”), 38:75 (“whom I have created with both My hands”), 81:19-25 (the Prophet [pbuh] saw Allāh in the clear horizon”). More often, though, the contact is intermediate, conducted through the Archangel Gabriel (Jibrīl); but even in direct contact, the emphasis remains, always and everywhere, on the infinite Transcendence of Allāh, and the grace of His transmission of truth to Muhammad and thus to us, e.g., in 81:19-25, supra: “Neither does He withhold grudgingly a knowledge of the Unseen.” Those who demand special physical proof are “too proud” and thus, even at the Last Trump, the ultimate physical vindication, they will find “no joy” (25:21-22).

Like all Jews and Christians, all Muslims are called upon to acknowledge the works of God “visible and invisible,” and to act accordingly. The point is well put by Imām Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (A.H. 631-676/A.D. 1234-1278), in the second of his famous *Forty Hadiths*. The Archangel Gabriel interrogates the Prophet, so as to instruct the faithful –

“[Gabriel] said: ‘Then tell me about al-Ihsān.’ [Muhammad] said: ‘It is to worship Allāh as though you are seeing Him and while you see him not, yet truly He sees you.’”

Al-Ihsān: the perfection of virtue, or benevolence: accepting less from others than is one’s due, giving more to others than is their due, and, as the very highest level of al-Islām, of submissive good deeds, it means comporting one’s life in complete conviction of the benevolence of the unseen God. This leads to the discipline of heart-and-mind together, and thus to *tasawwuf*, consciousness of God (spiritual development), to Sufism, and, ultimately, to Gülen.



“Twenty years after the famous Prayer for Peace, what evidence is there of its effectiveness?” Then, hearing that part of our conference turns on “reconciling and balancing reason and faith,” the skeptics’ response becomes one of outright dismissal: “What has reason-with-revelation, a private construct, a *belief* of individuals, to do with the great affairs of state? What has faith to do with reality?”

B. The question has been asked and answered. In May, 1935, the French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, a consummate practitioner of *Realpolitik*,<sup>84</sup> visited Stalin; he attempted to advise the Communist dictator to restore some freedom of worship to Catholics in his domain, so as to gain favor with the Pope. Stalin famously retorted, “The Pope? How many divisions has *he* got?”<sup>85</sup>

History returned the answer in Victory Square, Warsaw, on 2 June 1979. The Polish Communist government, originally established by Stalin’s divisions, tried to control the crowd movement and press coverage of the Pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II.<sup>86</sup> But 2,000,000 Poles lined the route from the airport to Victory Square; 1,000,000 crowded into the Square itself for the Papal Mass. Having failed to dissuade the crowds, the regime ordered all cameras to ignore them and focus exclusively on the Pope.

Consequently, viewers throughout Eastern Europe, while perfectly focused on John Paul during his homily, could still hear the extraordinary and unbroken chant of the laity, suddenly intoxicated with liberty: “*My chcemy Boga!*” – “We want God!” And then, at the moment that the Pope elevated the

Rather than blind faith, this discipline requires the highest level of judgment, superseding at once the defects of the senses and the weaknesses of the flesh. This is our life opened powerfully to the grace of God. Jewish scholars speak of lovingkindness (*hesed*) and judgment (*gevurah*) brought into balance or harmony (*tiferet*). As Pope John Paul II put it, in words that could have been recited by Gülen, it is a judgment that is vindicated in right action –

“The true and proper meaning of mercy does not consist only in looking, however penetratingly and compassionately, at moral, physical, or material evil: mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man.”

John Paul II, P. (1980) *Dives in Misericordia*, 6 (Rome: Vatican).

<sup>83</sup> The First World Day of Prayer for Peace was convened by Pope John Paul II in Assisi on 27 October 1986. As he concluded, “This day at Assisi has helped us become more aware of our religious commitments. But it has also made the world, looking at us through the media, more aware of the responsibility of each religion regarding problems of war and peace.” *Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions*, Basilica of St. Francis, 27 Oct 1986, 6 (Rome: Vatican).

<sup>84</sup> Laval, four times Prime Minister, sought in May, 1935, to balance the resurgence of Germany by forging a purely *Realpolitik* alliance of France with Great Britain, Mussolini’s Italy, and Stalin’s Russia; this entailed, *inter alia*, giving the Italian fascist army a free hand in Abyssinia, and trying to reduce Stalin’s persecution of believers so as to mitigate the Church’s fierce anti-Communism. The Abyssinian appeasement was leaked and Laval was forced to resign; he only returned to ministerial politics once the Wehrmacht had overrun France; as Vice Premier and then Prime Minister of Vichy France, he repeatedly offered more concessions to Hitler than he demanded; Laval was captured, tried, and executed in 1945.

<sup>85</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. I: *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1948), 135.

<sup>86</sup> Elected the first Polish Pope in October, 1978, Karol Wojtyła asked permission to plan to return to his native land on 8 May 1979, so as to celebrate the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanisław Szczepanowski, a victim of the Polish King, Bolesław II (rather as Archbishop Thomas à Becket would later be martyred by King Henry II of England). Stanisław represented the highest convergence of theological and political morality; most Polish kings had been crowned while kneeling before his sarcophagus. Fearful of that symbolism, the Communist authorities, under Party Secretary Edward Gierek, banned the Pope from Poland for the month of May, and strictly prescribed his routes and his media coverage in June. Then, thinking to control the crowds, they ordered all Warsaw cabs in for inspection, froze the public bus service, and declared there were no extra trains available. Having unwittingly advertised their fear, they made Poles all the more determined to attend the papal pilgrimage; John Paul drew the largest crowds in the nation’s thousand-year history.



consecrated Host, a million Poles fell silent and fell on their knees – and with them, the Soviet empire began to fall.

### 3. *Deus suam gloriam non quaerit propter se, sed propter nos.*<sup>87</sup>

The power of belief is the common heritage of the People of the Book. The first Revelation in Islām affirms not only the majesty and generosity of Allāh, but His concomitant concern that we pursue knowledge unreservedly (*cf.* “even to China”). Islāmīc theologians’ late Medieval deprecation of science was as much a Qur’ānic as a strategic and political failure. Re-appropriation of Qur’ānic scientific and cognitional value will come, not from preoccupied power elites, but from those who “withdraw and return,” historically inspired by Gülen, for he is the first theologian in Post-Modern Islām to focus on our deepest yearning: *for the unrestricted love and knowledge of God*. Though universal, our yearning is rarely addressed by Western politicians and academicians; instead, it may be our own thought experiment that leads us to affirm it anew. As Ancient and Modern Chinese history demonstrates, this is an affirmation that can only be invited, never commanded. But the invitation, like the power of belief, should never be underestimated.

A. The central issue of the intersection of power and faith was put starkly in a World Affairs Council exchange in Washington, DC. The guest was a Saudi fighter pilot and Prince; the interlocutor was an American Navy lawyer. The lawyer led off by observing that on *Laylat al-Qadr*, the Night of Measures,<sup>88</sup> when the Prophet Muhammad (*Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam*),<sup>89</sup> received the very first revelation from the Archangel Gabriel, the premium was placed not only on the majesty and

<sup>87</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (S.T.), II-II, q. 132, a.1 ad 1. Here, in the Second Part of the Second Part (Secunda Secundae Partis), Thomas discusses in sequence the three theological virtues – Faith, Hope, and Charity – and then the four cardinal virtues – Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. Drawing heavily on his Muslim, Jewish, and Classical forebears in philosophy, as he does throughout the *Summa*, Thomas seeks to strike a balance in our conduct within each of the virtues, a balance between excesses and deficiencies of the given major virtue (a positive habit that has become second nature); thus, in his examination of Fortitude, QQ 123-140, his analysis turns in Q. 132 to vain glory (inani gloria); he begins with the inquiry, whether the desire of glory is a sin (Utrum appetitus gloriae sit peccatum)? Though he specifically invokes SS Augustine and Matthew, the gravamen of his response (italicized here, and the subtitle in the text, supra), the centrality of God’s glory, could have been penned by Gülen.

“Reply to Obj. 1. As Augustine says on John 13:13, ‘You call Me Master and Lord; and you say well.’ (Tract. lviii in Joan.): ‘Self-complacency is fraught with danger of one who has to beware of pride. But He Who is above all, however much He may praise Himself, does not uplift Himself. For knowledge of God is our need, not His: nor does any man know Him unless he be taught of Him who knows.’ It is therefore evident that God seeks glory, not for His own sake, but for ours. In like manner a man may rightly seek his own glory for the good of others, according to Matt. 5:16, ‘That they may see Your good works, and glorify Your Father Who is in Heaven.’”

The works of Gülen are replete with warnings to those in service (hizmet) not to seek personal acclaim, much less socio-economic preference: service of Allāh is all. Here again the consistency of God’s Revelation to humanity, a cardinal precept of Islām, leads to the high convergence we would expect: v., e.g., the central injunction for all Jesuits to act for “the greater glory of God”: “Ad majorem Dei gloriam.”

<sup>88</sup> Laylat al-Qadr is more popularly rendered in the Anglo-American world as the “Night of Power,” a very honorific translation (understandably, given the context of transmission that night), by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Some have objected to the non-literal translation, but the sense of majesty and awe comes through quite clearly.

<sup>89</sup> “May God bless him and grant him peace,” usually abbreviated “saw” directly from the Arabic or “pbuh” in English (for “Peace be upon him”); the beautiful reverence that Muslims demonstrate in repeating the phrase after every use of his name is a central feature of Islāmīc culture, but one that requires different expression in the Western cultures, which avoid verbal repetition; e.g., English writers traditionally show reverence by capitalization: Prophet.



generosity of God, but also on His concomitant concern that we learn: "... Recite<sup>90</sup> in the name of your Lord, Who is the Creator; who created man from a clot. Recite! And your Lord is most bountiful. (He Who taught) the use of the pen taught man what he did not know." (Qur'ān 96:1-5) The Qur'ān consistently affirms that God is all-knowing,<sup>91</sup> that He requires us to exercise our minds as much as our hearts,<sup>92</sup> and that this requirement is universal: "God is the light of the Heavens and the earth. ...neither of the East nor of the West... God doth guide whom He will to His Light; ..." (24:35) Most succinctly, 20:114: "...My Lord, advance me in knowledge: *Rabbi, zidni 'ilma!*"

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Imām al-Bukhāri, *The Beginning of the Revelation*.

The famous first command to the Prophet, "Iqra!", is traditionally translated as "Recite!", in part because there was no text provided by Gabriel and in part due to Muhammad's illiteracy; but the verb, which gives rise to the verbal noun, "Qur'ān," is bivalent: it also means, "Read!" (The Qur'ān is now both a holy recital and a holy reading.) The recitations of the Prophet, echoed by his closest successors, were eventually committed to writing, at which point the premier command gained a new depth of meaning, for literate generations of Muslims were led not only to read but to turn over the sacred text, to study it in comparative ways not easily accessible via a memorized text; v. Walter J. Ong, S.J., for the epistemic differences between oral cultures and "chirographic" cultures: the cultures, precisely, of the "pen."

The Enlightenment had assumed a linear progression from oral to written civilization – a gradual yet irreversible ascent – but that blithe reading of history could not envisage the recent and accelerating reversion to a more oral form of expression in Western culture, i.e., a "concomitant pattern of progress and decline," a pattern driven technologically in America by the telephone, then the television, and now the Internet, especially e-mail. Since the Second World War, the level of public discourse in the United States has undergone a steady but popularly unremarked decline in both sentence structure and vocabulary; e.g., what was once the unique preserve of the campaign button and the bumper sticker has now become the standard fare of political discourse; and this decline in public sophistication of debate occurs not by some imposition from above, but by popular acquiescence. Political handlers warn their candidates that Americans no longer vote so much for those whom they admire (the aspirational vote) as for those with whom they feel most comfortable: Who is most like us? Contrast, e.g., the level of regular public expression conscientiously adopted by President John F. Kennedy, the twelfth-grade level, so as to preserve a natural sense of complexity in the issues under public consideration, with the level of vocabulary and sentence length preferred by the incumbent president in his unscripted Q.-&A.: the fifth-grade level.

On a separate, global point, the Night of Power also reminds us that earthly power-mongers in any age and culture notoriously disdain personal study and public complexity; the simplistic black-and-white contrasts that they hammer home in public discourse best serve their (sometimes unwitting) drive to accrue more power, usually by vilification of others, both foreign and domestic, and then by a concomitant demand for more support.

It is instructive in this global civilizational context to consider that the first revelation to Muhammad should put a premium on the rise to literacy, the necessity for a complex understanding, and the power of discovery and communication; all symbolized by the pen.

<sup>91</sup> Many of the "99 Names" of Allāh emphasize one aspect or another of His omniscience, e.g., Al-Ālim, the All-Knowing; Al-Khabīr, the All-aware; Al-Hakīm, the All-Wise.

<sup>92</sup> Just in the opening sūrahs (chapters) of the Qur'ān, some of the best-known verses (āyāt) on the centrality of the quest for understanding and how it pleases Allāh include 2:269, 3:190-191, 29:20, 39:9, 41:53, and 58:11. The Ahādīth or Sayings of the Prophet, especially the ranking of the hadīth qudsī (pure hadīth, i.e., the rare saying that not only enjoys the best-authenticated chain of transmission – isnād – but also is considered by the first witnesses to have been a reiteration by Muhammad of a direct revelation), reinforce the twofold message that religious knowledge must bear fruit (number 6 of the famous "40 Sayings") and that for those whose reflective and fruitful lives have recommended them to the Mercy of Allāh, the pleasures of Paradise are beyond their knowledge, even beyond their imagination (37). Most succinctly: "Whoever follows a path seeking knowledge, Allāh will make his path to Paradise easy because of it." (Ibn 'Abbas, in three collections of Sayings)



“How was this epistemological imperative so narrowed as to be nearly discounted in many fields of inquiry in the course of the last seven centuries?<sup>93</sup> And what but that long lack of a universal scope of inquiry, especially in science, could account for the eclipse of the Golden Age of Islām?”

This is not the expected level of discourse in the corridors of Washington. But the first Arab astronaut is a man of many talents, as open-minded as he is decisive, as reflective as he is straightforward.

His Royal Highness, Prince Sultan Salman Abdulaziz Saud, graciously acknowledged that the ‘ulamā’ – the scholastic and judicial scholar-leaders of Sunni and Shi’ite Islām alike – had virtually restricted the scope of public research to the book of the Qur’ān, to the detriment of studying the “book” of nature. This failure was not only scientific, and thus eventually strategic and political, but it was also Qur’ānic: the failure to investigate God’s creation was in clear derogation of the divine command.

Since he, as a Saudi, had been the first Muslim to orbit the earth, the Prince naturally hoped that his Kingdom would lead the worldwide Islāmic community – the ummah – in developing a new, personalized understanding, a neo-ijtihād, of modern scientific values implicit in the Qur’ān.<sup>94</sup> This would revolutionize the deep popular ambivalence, particularly on the Arab street, about “Western” science.

Moreover, being one of the most sporting members of the Royal Family, as well as one of the most computer-adept, Prince Sultan was well placed to inspire Saudis – just as he inspired his interlocutors in NASA and DC. But revolutions in theoretical and practical political philosophy rarely proceed from the power center of society (recall the French, Soviet, and Chinese Revolutions, all led by elite outsiders, or the popular revolutions of 1989).<sup>95</sup> Instead, the elder members of the Royal Family decided to have Sultan chair the Benevolent Association for Handicapped Children, and then to become, in one of the most closed lands on earth, the Minister of Tourism.

B. Unlike the unfortunate Prince – a prophet without honor in his own land - it would be M. Fethullah Gülen, this humble man from a village near Erzurum, who would be given the opportunity to issue the historic invitation that could make all the difference in Islāmic faith and society. And the very first indication of his genius was precisely his understanding that he could only offer an invitation.

Let’s recall a neutral, non-Islāmic example of the difference between invitation and command, even at the royal level. During the Warring States Era in Ancient China (c.475-221 B.C.),<sup>96</sup> there unfolded under rare royal auspices the single greatest set of exchanges among all the schools of philosophy during the long “Contention of a Hundred Schools of Thought;”<sup>97</sup> this occurred at a special academy,

<sup>93</sup> The reduction of inquiry was twofold: on the one hand, a long theologico-philosophical debate resulted, after al-Ghazzali, in the effective closing of most philosophical and empirical inquiry, in favor of a uniquely Islamic theologico-jurisprudential discourse; on the other hand, the terms of that discourse were restricted to the methods and scope of inquiry of schools of thought that had already matured centuries before, i.e., during the early part of the Golden Age; the combination of those two reductions will be the sense in which we use the controversial term, the “closing of the gates of ijtihād.”

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Islam, Postmodernism, and Other Futures: a Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, Schail Inayatullah & Gail Boxwell, eds. (Sterling, VA: Pluto Pr., 2003); I am indebted to Ertuğrul Cubuku for introducing me to his thought.

<sup>95</sup> Two of the few revolutions to be led by large numbers of the ruling elite, Britain’s Glorious Revolution of 1688 and America’s War for Independence, 1775-1783, were, in the realm of political theory, essentially conservative movements, as both sought, albeit in different ways and with different structures resulting, to vindicate the “ancient liberties” of Englishmen.

<sup>96</sup> Pinyin transliteration: Zhan4-guo2 Shi2-dai4.

<sup>97</sup> Bai3-jia1 zheng1-ming2.



the Jixia Palace of Learning.<sup>98</sup> King Wei of Qi<sup>99</sup> founded the Academy, and his son, Pi Qiang, King Xuan of Qi,<sup>100</sup> raised the level of discourse on philosophical, legal, moral, and strategic concerns to their highest level by making it clear that there would be no royal favorite positions, but rather a clear preference for vigorous debate. King Xuan understood that if his academy became famous throughout China, then the prestige of his kingdom, the caliber of scholars it would attract, and the ideas they could give him for increasing the strength of the kingdom would all be considerably enhanced. Indeed, the Kingdom of Qi prospered for another century.<sup>101</sup> It was this very model that came to mind when, in the winter of 1956-57, the Modern communist “Red emperor,” Mao Zedong, proclaimed, “Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend.”<sup>102</sup> Chinese intellectuals, aware of the Ancient precedent but also aware of the ideological intolerance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), were reluctant to take Mao at his word. He publicly remonstrated with them: bureaucrats needed feedback. They began to criticize, first gingerly in the spring, then vigorously in June and July, 1957, decisions by CCP officials that were demonstrably harmful to the nation. But this was far more than what Mao had anticipated; he not only cut off the “Hundred Flowers Campaign,” but launched an “Anti-Rightist Campaign” – those whom he had pressured in the spring to speak their mind now paid for it with prison sentences. Until he died in 1976, no public criticism of Mao would be tolerated, not even during the extraordinary famine brought on by his Great Leap Forward or the unprecedented ravages of the Red Guard during his Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Wei and Xuan had brought peace and plenty to their kingdom by their cultivation of unrivalled free horizons of public discourse; but Mao, after the failure of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, brought such suffering upon the Chinese people as they had not known in any era, and so Deng Xiaoping found it possible to replace most of Mao’s draconian economic and cultural regimen in just a few years, permitting in non-political and non-legal domains freedoms beyond the dreams of ’57. In 1976, China stood among the poorest nations in the world; today, her wealth, productivity, and U.S. Treasury bill holdings are such that no White House or Treasury decisions can be taken without careful consideration of the response of Zhongnanhai. Xuan stands twice vindicated.

C. *“The wishes and demands of human beings are boundless and their expectations are infinite. Even if the whole world were to be given to humanity, its appetite would not be satisfied nor would its ambitions cease.”*<sup>103</sup> The assertion is bold; given its scope, Gülen implicitly challenges a line of development in Western philosophy extending all the way from Aristotle<sup>104</sup> – “All humans by nature desire to know” – to Gadamer.<sup>105</sup> For while Gadamer explores in great depth the gap between human “horizons” (personal or cultural sets of attitudes, beliefs, desires), which are often in flux but which can nonetheless be entered (his famous “fusion of horizons”) if we are willing to embrace an alien

<sup>98</sup> Ji4-xia4 Xue2-gong1.

<sup>99</sup> Qi2 Wei1 Wang2.

<sup>100</sup> Qi2 Xuan1 Wang2.

<sup>101</sup> Qi was the last state to fall to Qin, in 221 B.C.; the King of Qin, having united all China, then declared himself Qin2 Shi3Huang2 Di4 – Qin, the First Emperor. He would serve as an implicit role model for Mao. In both cases, many of their signature policies, as well as their complete centralization of power, died with them.

<sup>102</sup> “Bai3 hua1 qi2-fang4; bai3 jia1 zheng1-ming2.”

<sup>103</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, “The Inner Profundity of Humankind,” in *The Fountain*, issue 52, Oct-Dec 2005, 4-7, at 6, ii.

<sup>104</sup> “Pantes anthropoi tou eidenai oregontai phusei.” *Metaphysics* 980a. [N.B. Anthropoi, not andres: not just “men”]

<sup>105</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1960; 6. Auflage, 1990). *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 1; *Truth and Method*, tr. J. Weinsheimer & D.G. Marshall (NY: Crossroad, 2d. rev. ed., 1989).



vision, Gülen asserts that we are always and everywhere called to transcend our horizon *qua* horizon, to transcend it utterly, toward the unconditionally infinite horizon, that of Allāh. Likewise, against Aristotle, Gülen affirms that we are called to essay this transcendent act not only intellectually, but also socially and spiritually. Gülen implicitly concurs with Pascal: “*Le Dieu d’Abraham, d’Isaac et de Jacob, non des philosophes et des savants.*”<sup>106</sup> Self-transcendence cannot be restricted to the rational plane of existence; the call to transcendence permeates every aspect of our life; and so we may discover that this omni-dimensional call comes, not from the god of the philosophers, the god of Reason, but from the God Who makes Himself known in history, the God of Revelation. For Revelation not only affirms Reason, but transcends it: “My ways are not your Ways.”<sup>107</sup> Revelation bids us attain our highest accomplishments – and confirms our unspoken suspicion that even they will not prove sufficient in our life. Gülen thus continues, “Explicitly or not, human souls expect another eternal abode, not to mention the fact that they hanker for the continuation of this transient world.”<sup>108</sup> In other words, while we cling to this world and its glittering prizes, at the very same time, our deepest yearning is not for any reward, but for redemption: for the unrestricted love and knowledge of God.

To Gülen, our threefold openness – intellectual, social, and spiritual – may be merely implicit in a Modern culture, but it is nonetheless universal. Like the “book of Nature,” it serves as a perpetual invitation to turn to Allāh (in specifically Sunni Turkish terms, *ih̄tida*). The openness of our desire is the key to our conversion (in more general terms of personal transformation, *dönüşüm*). We all of us want to know and to be known; we all of us want to love and to be loved; and we want to do this, not only in the visible company of our neighbors, but also in cooperation with any invisible ground for our existence. For as we all of us discover, regardless of culture, or of upbringing, we are none of us necessary beings, and we most certainly none of us created ourselves: we are merely contingent beings. The primal question of our existence is whether this contingency is purely material – a blind product of cosmic reactions – or if this contingency is as reasonably and lovingly designed as it is intelligible and awe-inspiring. If there is a ground to our existence, then it utterly transcends us, now and forever. And its expectations would be equally transcendent to anything our ego could imagine. Thus far sheer openness brings us: merely following our primal question brings us to the possibility of conversion, a threefold conversion, at once reasonable, moral, and spiritual. To discover the contingency of our existence is to inquire, *eo ipso*, as to the possibility of a necessary ground to our existence; and to ask that question just as ineluctably entails the concomitant question, What would such a ground require? In sum, openness entails its own process. We begin by asking the universal question, Are we merely a cosmic “fluke,” or is there a transcendent origin for life in the universe? We rapidly discover that answers have varied, particularly in Modernity; and yet, if we persist, we also discover that, by virtue of that very inquiry, we transcend all spatio-temporal concerns: we affirm horizons of desire beyond our work-a-day world and beyond all possible rewards in our world.

To grow beyond our earliest egotistic eruptions – our temper tantrums as a 2-year-old – and beyond our easy-going inquisitiveness as a 10-year-old, beyond even our intense self-preoccupation as a 16-year-old, is to turn to face death and then, and only then, the meaning of life. It is to transcend the

<sup>106</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Mémorial*, *Pensées*: “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not of the philosophers and the intellectuals.” Pascal draws on Exodus 3:6 and Matthew 22:32.

<sup>107</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9: For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are My ways your ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are My ways above your ways and My thoughts above your thoughts.

<sup>108</sup> Gülen, *op. cit.*



sensationalism of our entertainment media and the cynicism of our mass culture. It is to discover that our horizons trump virtually anything on offer on the silver screen or in the corridors of power. And then we discover, if we persist, that our openness not only entails its own process, a process that has carried us far beyond the restricted horizons of a materialistic culture, but that that process itself is normative. Regardless of culture or upbringing, our questions carry us toward conversion.

This initially most open horizon, this unrestricted yearning in our formative years, serves as Gülen's most fundamental postulate, just as it could serve for any individuals who reflect upon their existential situation, anywhere, anytime. For regardless of whether an adult ultimately affirms, blurs, or denies the goal of this initial yearning — regardless of whether the adult chooses to follow the path of atheism, agnosticism, polytheism, or theism — the fact of our primal openness and inquiry, our initial state of desire, is attested by all cultures, historic or prehistoric, from the glorious cave paintings of Lascaux to the defeat of Leninism. Yet, currently in the West, this primal horizon is rarely acknowledged in our private but predominant mode of work-a-day existence; even more discouragingly, in the public, civic dimension, it is almost never developed by our political and strategic elites, much less even mentioned in our laïcist lecture halls; it is as though that which is deepest, because it is also the most potentially divisive, must never be addressed. Moreover, if these professional and public silences were not daunting enough, the maintenance of this open horizon in early adulthood requires not only an initial counter-cultural decision by individual Westerners — a decision against all the subtle pressures to conform to the silences of professional and public discourse — but, because we are intrinsically dynamic creatures, moving instinctively either to confirm or deny our own potential bases for responsible living, the maintenance of our horizon also requires an arduous self-examination by each of us, individually, if it is ultimately to be confirmed. By our nature, we cannot stand pat. We must find the means to confirm or deny our decision for what constitutes our own responsible way through life. And if we do find the means to confirm a responsible way through life, we may well find that, far from standing still or even shrinking, our horizon actually expands. Even as we affirm our hard-won decision, we begin to value and affirm the hard-won decisions of others. Commitment is inherently expansive — as depth calls to depth.

For Westerners now seeking to come to grips with the gifts of Gülen, we need, before all else, to understand why it is that his gifts are universal. When Gülen speaks to Erzurum and Izmir, why should Paris and New York pay heed? What is it that he has encouraged Turks to appropriate to themselves that we, too, should make our own? The single best Post-Modern method of such self-appropriation of how it is that we initially think and feel in terms of an unrestricted horizon — of how, despite the pervasive cynicism and sensationalism, we grope forward in our quest for a hint of the knowledge of God, of the love of our Redeemer — is perhaps that of Bernard Lonergan, *Insight*.<sup>109</sup> While we cannot hope to do justice here to one of the most demanding works of philosophy in our era, we may try to show how it re-orientes us in our practical lives. A simple thought experiment, tracing four steps in the every-day life of a tourist in Turkey, may be the quickest way to confirm this, to confirm that following our questions is a normative and universal method, a method that Gülen is re-developing for Turkey and all the ummah.

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<sup>109</sup> *Collected Works of Lonergan*, vol. 3, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, F.E. Crowe & R.M. Doran, eds. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Pr., [1957], 5<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., 1992, 2000); hereafter, *Insight*.



### Step 1: Recalling our most basic mental state.

Let's imagine that we are at Kuşadası, lying on one of the beaches or in an old hammam (*hamam*). Between taking plunges in the Aegean or following the sequence of the warm, hot, and cooling rooms, respectively, we are pretty much immersed in brute physical *experience* (*deneyim* or *tecrübe*), with very little in the way of thought: this is about as close as we come to the realm of sheer animal extroversion. This is also the realm, when we later reflect back on it, of *naïve realism*, of the mistaken notion that “seeing is knowing.” For even though we discovered as children that our senses repeatedly deceive us (*e.g.*, when we see an oar “bend” in the water), nonetheless, in our every day, common-sense preoccupations, our work-a-day world, we do not take those experiences and raise them to the level of systematic, theoretical reflection — it hardly seems practical to reflect upon those subtly formative discoveries, indeed, “only philosophers do that!” Far easier to alternate between the practical necessities of work and, for the rest of the time, to immerse ourselves in sensory pleasure!

### Step 2: Examining how we transcend that most basic state.

Moving up the coast, we come to the ruins of Troy (*Truva*); we hear the tour guide explain how Heinrich Schliemann, excavating the site in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, mistook levels I and II for the actual level that dates from the time of the Trojan War, now held to be level VIIa. We not only see the ruins and hear the guide — we not only experience the incoming data of sense — we begin to add to our experience on a wholly new level: for as those data come in, something else happens in our consciousness. As we hear how Schliemann, an amateur archaeologist who was more of a businessman on the make, not only dug indiscriminately, thus destroying much of the layering, but probably planted “finds” (*e.g.*, Priam's treasure), it hits us, all of a sudden, that archaeology is nothing like what we imagined. It is not a simple digging down through neat cross-sections of old towns, it is not an uncovering of what was just waiting to be seen; it is much more of an active reconstruction of those ancient and truly ruined sections. This is an “Aha!” moment, this is a moment of *insight*. It shocks us: we feel the shock. We want to test the feeling: it needs spelling out, it needs *understanding*. In other words, after the first level of experience, there follows a second and rapidly sequenced two-part level of insight (*sezgi*) and understanding (*anlama* or *anlayış*). We ask, “What is it?” (traditionally, *Quid sit?*). We study the brief printed explanations around the site. But we want to be sure of our understanding: “Is it so?” (*An sit?*). We may buy a couple of books or, better yet, talk to a professional archaeologist. We want to answer all the questions that reasonably come to mind: we want a virtually unconditioned answer to our question, “Is it really so?” In other words, we move up to a third level, to *judgment*, to a virtually unconditioned affirmation or rejection of our initial insight. This judgment is analogous to a judge's verdict (*hüküm*), for it requires us to sift all the relevant, material, and probative evidence, pro and con, before we can render an objective decision to affirm or reject our initial insight; it is a final determination, very much like a judge's — only it is more demanding, since our own personal prejudices are very much likely to affect the decision without us having any professional training to detect and isolate them. (How often do we care to be professional about ourselves?) And if we are often blind to our own prejudices, how much more often are we blind to our own processes of thought; how often do we fail to reflect, not just on the data of sense, but on the data of consciousness! Seeing the archaeological site is not knowing; processing all the relevant questions about archaeology is knowing: our judgment is our affirmation of reality. We do not know the world by what we see, or even by what we think we understand; we know it only by what we affirm beyond a reasonable doubt. Our world is ultimately not a realm of animal extroversion (a realm that is



already real and out there now, as it were). Nor is it a world of ideal forms. It is a world of judgment, a world of substantiated meaning. Once we proceed through the natural but arduous method of following our questions, once we rise from experience through insight-and-understanding, so as to achieve judgment, then we know something of reality, something about the world suggested by the data of sense; and by the very same measure, once we turn that process on itself, once we examine our own mode of knowing, then we know something of the data of consciousness, something of the invariant pattern of human judgment (a judgment that cannot be refuted without self-refutation: I judge that I do not judge). This accomplishment is as rare as it is beautiful, as good as it is true; we might even call it the archaeology of the mind! For what we have dug up and appropriated to ourselves is no less than our own mind, the mind that is unrestricted, the mind that seeks the eternally true, the eternally good, the eternally beautiful. Having appropriated it through a process that transcends the mere data of sense, a process that turns on the data of consciousness, a consciousness that has been verified as a virtually unconditioned truth, we have appropriated our judgment of reality in a manner that is, in Modern and Post-Modern parlance, thoroughly “critical.” Though we may never have heard the phrase before, we find that we are, not naïve realists, nor idealists, but “*critical realists*.”

### **Step 3. Affirming that our deepest horizons are also the most potentially divisive**

Continuing north, we come at last to Istanbul and the world-famous museum of Hagia Sophia (*Ayasofya*). Inside, over the southwest vestibule, we find the restored mosaic of the Virgin and Child, flanked by the great Emperors Constantine I and Justinian I. We also find two women standing before it: an Eastern Orthodox nun visiting from the Balkans, and a Shi’ite tourist from Qom, in full chador. They are looking at the same mosaic, but they are not seeing the same thing. Is this the Mother of the last great Prophet before Muhammad, or, as the mosaic asserts, *Mater Theou*: the Mother of God?

### **Step 4. Affirming that these deep divisions are not the end of our inquiry.**

At the third level, the level of judgment, the tourist and the nun will silently disagree with each other. There is, however, a fourth level, the level of permanent *decision*, where they begin once again to converge. For at the level of decision (*karar*), at the point of a lifetime’s commitment, they may each resolve to live in love with God – unrestricted love – and thus, concomitantly, to live in love with their neighbors. Everything is offered up, as Justinian offers a model of Hagia Sofia and Constantine, of Constantinople itself. And in the beauty of this mosaic, our very resolve is refreshed.

Thus our four steps and our four levels. Through experience, insight-and-understanding, judgment, and decision, we can come to a love - a peace - that surpasses understanding. This is an exceedingly hard-won peace. Lonergan was fond of remarking that “knowledge makes a bloody entrance;” how much more painful is the decision to follow where that knowledge points: to unrestricted love!

The four steps are as easy to read as a tourist map. But the four levels are as difficult to ascend as, say, Mount Ararat. For they require us to strip away everything but the barest necessities for reflection, and then, as we mount through the levels of reflection, to let nothing loosen our grip on those necessities, the necessities of appropriating to ourselves, at every step of the way, our own mode of thought, a mode that is invariant through all cultures and faiths, a method that thus serves as a bridge between all the sons and daughters of Abraham, and beyond – that unites all the children of God.



To recap: What did I hear and see at Troy? What insight did that experience trigger? How well did I spell out that insight in my own understanding? More difficult still: Did that understanding answer all the pertinent questions? Can I now affirm that understanding, judge it to be as complete as I can make it under the circumstances, that is, virtually unconditioned? Most difficult of all: what does this relatively simple process of a tourist's judgment reveal about judgment per se? What does it tell me about my mind? And my heart? Or the heart of the lady from Qom?

It may be that Western philosophers and theologians will find that the method of Lonergan gets us beyond the fashionable rhetoric of "choice": Stanislaus chooses to be Catholic; Stanley, to be Jewish; and Selim, to be Muslim. For our politically correct rhetoric of choice in the West requires nothing more than a facile tolerance of other choices; choice entails no method, and thus no rigorous method of life decision — and thus, too, no possibility of profound respect for the permanent-commitment decisions of others. Choice is little more than the dinner-menu decision writ large. Against the egotistic demands of individuals, the appetites of nations, and the momentous risk of the clash of civilizations, choice is no choice at all.

It may be, too, that Western analysts will test this critically realist method and then find, in their own judgment, that it begins to open our horizon to the gifts of Gülen. This finding is not a fusion of horizons, but a transcendence of our own parochial views; for Gülen points, never to himself or to his own worldview (much less to a "choice of lifestyle"), but to the infinite: to the God who is All-Mighty, All-Merciful — and utterly Mysterious.

If we have experienced and reflected upon that Mystery, an experience and reflection that is at once joyous, sorrowful, glorious, and even luminous, then we have made a profound life-decision, one that enables us to follow the alien words and the identical processes of Gülen. Only through judgment do we know judgment. Only through our own life's resolve can we esteem another's. Only when depth calls to depth do we find convergence.

We have suggested how difficult the process of intellectual self-appropriation is, that is, the process of intellectual conversion. We shall see that the processes of moral and spiritual conversion are no less demanding — but, fortunately for the peace of humanity, much more often undertaken!

In approaching Gülen, we may say, with Lonergan, that the only authentic objectivity is authentic subjectivity. And only through authentic subjectivity do we find *convergence*; it takes a Gandhi to wisely, delicately, keenly appreciate the Gospel; a Merton, the Dalai Lama.

This quality of convergence — *ayn noktada birleşme* — is one of the most attractive qualities of Rumi. For when one of the greatest poets of a civilization and one of its most enduring spiritual leaders is also one of its most open individuals — not in the fashionable sense of sampling other choices, but in the enduring expression of an existential apprehension of value — then we all of us potentially may find ourselves attracted to him in turn. The openness of genius is itself an inspiration. Sensing it in our depths, we may well resolve to go and do likewise. Like the nun from Skopje and the tourist from Qom, we may resolve to go forth to love and serve the Lord and one another.

And no desire could be more democratic. For this effective appreciation, this resolve, just like its antecedent life-decision, can only be sown and cultivated between an individual's soul and her Maker. No principality, no philosophy, can pre-determine it.

For neither that decision nor that convergence can be commanded. Here, we begin to discover the intensely practical value and difficulty of conversion. It is not a matter of power but of individual



cultivation — and, if we are exceedingly lucky, of a culture that rightly adjudges and therefore encourages such unbounded cultivation.<sup>110</sup> But mass culture, in any of its manifestations, *e.g.*, American or Arabian, shows no such luck, be it intellectually, morally, or spiritually: only the technological genius that immediately accrues more wealth and prestige to the culture is popularly adored. (“Ivory tower” genius is just as readily dismissed in Riyadh as in Washington; what is wanted is useful, applicable genius: applicable to power.) There is an irony here, for technological progress is dependent upon a key portion of the very intellectual conversion that it blithely dismisses: it depends upon the individual stepping out of the dominant industrial perspectives and envisioning a problem in an unprecedented way: it requires an imagination it cannot create, much less control.

Prince Sultan knew that there was nothing uniquely “Western” about science; subatomic particles function no differently in a Japanese reactor than in a French reactor; or, as Aristotle put it, fire burns the same in Persia as in Greece.<sup>111</sup> But Greece discovered science, Persia did not; the difference was not in the laws of science, but in the laws of society, the customs that define that horizons of inquiry. The extraordinarily broad and deep horizons of Athenian society led not only to the development of democracy, but to the expectation of full citizen participation, both in the informal public philosophical and prudential debates in the Agora, the marketplace, and in the formal legal and political deliberations of the Ekklesia, the Assembly, and the Dikasteria, the jury courts. Indeed, Pericles instituted public jury payments so as to ensure the participation of (relatively poor) daily wage-earners — any Athenian citizen who imagined that he could take a free ride on communal responsibility and look only to his own affairs was called by his neighbors an “idiotes” — a word that serves not only as the obvious root of our Modern “idiot,” but also as the unadvertised basis of our Hobbesian-Lockean social contract: What’s in it for me? And yet, as in Ancient Athens, so too in Post-Modern America: that culture flourishes most in which each individual discovers and contributes his or her best; and it is only the highest horizons that invite the apex of discovery and contribution.

The outline of the great gifts of Gülen may now be identified: his life-long drive to empower the average Turk, first in the understanding and perfection of individual faith, then in the understanding and perfection of science in society, and finally, the renewal of society itself. Like Prince Sultan, Gülen understands that there is nothing exclusively Western about science, that there are very good historical and theological reasons rather than exclusively scientific reasons why the High Middle Ages in Western Europe took the first hints of empiricism from the ummah and pursued them, at the very moment that the ‘ulamā’ began to discourage such inquiries. Unlike the unfortunate Prince, Gülen has been afforded the opportunity to issue the historic invitation that makes all the difference in faith and society: to re-open our full horizons of desire, our horizons of knowledge, of love, and of service. The gifts of Gülen set in sharp relief the crassness of the technological imperative and, even more starkly, the failure of the technocrats’ own self-understanding. What Gülen boldly proposes is no less than a

<sup>110</sup> Such cultures, though rare, span the globe in their emergence: the Warring States period in Ancient China, Athens from Pericles to Aristotle, 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>-century Ireland, 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>-century Damascus-Baghdad, 13<sup>th</sup>-century Bologna, Paris, Cologne, Oxford, and Cambridge, 15 to 16<sup>th</sup>-century Istanbul under the Ottomans, 17<sup>th</sup> to 18-century France, England, & Scotland; 19<sup>th</sup>-century Germany and America, are just a few of the societies that encouraged an extraordinary profusion of individual quests on the intellectual, moral, and/or spiritual planes.

<sup>111</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, V.7.1134b24-1135a5: the famous passage challenging the facile notion of the Sophists that all justice is merely a matter of convention. As Aristotle rightly judged, it is not only the laws of nature, but our own deepest intellectual aspirations, that are universal. Along with the Jewish Prophets, the Confucian scholar-gentlemen, the Hindu Brahmins, the Buddhist saints, it has been the work of subsequent philosophers, theologians, lawyers, and statesmen, East and West, to extend his judgment to the moral and spiritual spheres.



new Turkish leadership of the ummah, but a leadership based, this time, not on military and administrative genius, but on the earlier and enduring genius of a Yunus Emre, a Rumi, a native depth, a genius that is as theoretical as it is practical, as powerful as it is spiritual.

If it works for some seventy million Turks, be they Sunni or Alevi, Jewish or Christian, then that will be because the moving genius — the spirit of the enterprise — is founded on universal aspirations.

But if they are universal, how can we Westerners continue to ignore them?

#### **4. “Only a concept embracing the whole in its wholeness can be called truly scientific.”**

In 1963, Niyazi Berkes, albeit in exile, wrote one of the best encomiums to the Kemalist regime; he urged that the regime had never intended to force secularism upon the masses, and thereby eradicate Muslim belief, but rather, by means of an incremental secularization, to deliver them to a more enlightened Islām.<sup>112</sup> Ordinary Turks would not be deprived of the resources of faith, but would instead update their faith: just as the sultanate and the caliphate had been swept away, so too superstition and folklore would yield to the methods of science; society would be thoroughly secularized, but the government would insure, through its Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), that individuals would be led to a Modern set of beliefs and rituals. Berkes noted that the attempt to enforce revised rituals, from introducing Turkish music to banning Arabic, failed; he did not recognize, however, that the philosophy of governmentally-inspired faith was a contradiction in terms: once again, deep faith can only be invited, not commanded. Nor did he fully recognize that the Western predicates for the effort, predicates dating from 19<sup>th</sup>-century positivism and materialism, were not only exhausted in Europe and America, and thus anachronistic, but they were also reductionistic: their attempt to make all aspects of public life, and even private religious ritual, conform to “dictates” of science, had nothing to do with the work of Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, *et al.*, but represented instead a form of scientism, a false reading and over-extension of scientific method to fields in which it had no natural application. Einstein famously held that “God does not play dice” with the laws of the universe; he did not tell us what God might play in a mosque.

At the same time, the Kemalist Revolution did thoroughly understand that the Ottoman-style importation of Western machines would be insufficient, that the technology would have to be adopted as well, and that this would require, in addition, an internalization of Western philosophy.<sup>113</sup> Technologically, and thus philosophically, and thus, too, politically, Turkey would have to modernize and this would require some degree of Westernization, though all of this would be determined by the guardians of the new Republic, the Army. As a former *New York Times* reporter from Istanbul has observed, “Today [the Turkish Army] is a victim of its own achievements. So successfully has it encouraged Turkey’s integration in the world that ever more Turks want to escape from its political power, which has become intrusive and suffocating. They have learned the lessons of democracy and now want to live by them.”<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately, the brass does not altogether realize how far the society has evolved, or how much Turkey, by virtue of its success, now serves as a role model and, thus, how

<sup>112</sup> Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, with a new Introduction by Feroz Ahmad (NY: Routledge, [1963], 1998).

<sup>113</sup> Sina Akşin, “The Nature of the Kemalist Revolution,” in David Shankland, ed., *The Turkish Republic at Seventy-Five Years: Progress – Development – Change* (Huntington, Cambridge: The Eothen Press, 1999), 14-28.

<sup>114</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent and Star: Turkey between Two Worlds* (NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001), 165.



much it could help reshape its geopolitical environment. “Rather they see a nation surrounded by enemies and populated by simpletons who are easily manipulated.”<sup>115</sup> Worse yet, the Kemalists outside the Army, the previously protected ruling elite in Ankara, who regard themselves as the *aydınlar*, the enlightened ones, have long treated all manifestations of faith among the vast rural — and now urban — majorities as signs of hopeless backwardness; while the Army worries about regional trends, the secular elite condemns most domestic political developments.<sup>116</sup> Not seeing democracy in action, but rather *irtica*, an upsurge in reactionary religion and obscurantism, the Kemalists feel caught in a *Kulturkampf*<sup>117</sup> — and just like Bismarck’s original culture war, they have shown no willingness to understand, much less dialogue with, the vast opposition. Looking back upon the 1920s and ’30s, when Atatürk swept away much of the opposition to modernization, the Kemalists today feel an uncanny “nostalgia for the Modern” — a nostalgia that, ironically, is itself reactionary.<sup>118</sup>

Then again, in regional terms, the secularists certainly have reason to worry. In the great arc of Islām, from Morocco to Indonesia, the “two great trends of democratization and identity assertion” studied by Esposito and Voll are a particularly volatile combination.<sup>119</sup> Not only are they “concurrent and vital,” but they are also fairly immune to secular Western influences; witness the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian election of January, 2006, and the increased popularity of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon after the summer war of 2006. Part of this upsurge is due, in yet another historical irony, to the decline of the ‘ulamā’ in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for it was the failure to come to grips with Modernity of that relatively quietistic scholasticism that cleared the way for the rise of the Muslim activist intellectuals in the late twentieth century.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, this activism, when not reducing faith to political imperatives, tends to reduce politics — and an aggressive military strategy — to a thoroughly fundamentalistic form of faith, one first articulated in virulent rejection of all aspects of Modern social life (except technology), in the early eighteenth century.<sup>121</sup> In sum, “Islamic reformism tended to become a legacy that was not developed and applied systematically, but instead employed or manipulated on occasion, in a diffuse and ad hoc fashion, when convenient by individuals, nationalist movements, and Islamic organizations.”<sup>122</sup>

Among Western scholars of the Middle East and of Islam, there is thus a general tendency to accept two of the major observations of Khaled Abou El Fadl. On the one hand, he notes the similarities between the ostensibly literalist “puritans” of the era of al-Ghazali, whom that great theologian described as “hadith hurlers — they use the inherited tradition and law to silence their opponents and

<sup>115</sup> Id., 168.

<sup>116</sup> Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1998), 316, 340.

<sup>117</sup> Heinz Kramer, *A Changing Turkey: the Challenge to Europe and the United States* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 66, 68-69.

<sup>118</sup> Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>119</sup> John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>120</sup> J. L. Esposito and J. O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16.

<sup>121</sup> John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1994), 374.

<sup>122</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (NY: Oxford University Press, rev. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2005), 145.



to stunt critical or creative thinking.”<sup>123</sup> Those so-called puritans<sup>124</sup> did not prevail in the first millennium of Islām. On the other hand, today, the “traditional institutions of Islam that historically acted to marginalize extremist creeds [*e.g.*, the Khawarij, Qaramites, and Assassins] no longer exist.”<sup>125</sup> The upshot is that Western scholars are deeply divided about the prospects and prescriptions for democracy within much of the house of Islām.<sup>126</sup> What agreement there is concerns the current perilous state of authoritarian stability through much of the region<sup>127</sup> — and the lack of tools among Western powers to move those regimes toward a democratic opening that would not deliver a newly retrograde form of puritanical rule: that would not thrust the Mideast out of the frying pan and into the fire.

What is missing in this literature is, first, the sociological phenomenon of the rise of the House of Service: of the great neighbor-oriented Islām inspired and led by Gülen. Second, because this is missing, Western political science and strategic literature too often describe an unacceptable alternative: either continue to support the authoritarian regimes or take a huge gamble on “Islamist” neo-puritan regimes. Third, political science and strategic projections for the mid-term future of the Mideast lack both philosophical and, surprisingly, theological depth. Edward Saïd, in *Orientalism*,<sup>128</sup> famously decried the Western colonial and postcolonial penchant for viewing the Near East and especially Islām as the “Other;” in yet another bitter irony, the one thing that Western social scientists have not been able to do, at least not in American political discourse, is to portray just how much the context for development in the Mideast is “other” than the starting suppositions in Anglo-American history. Whether it was discussions of “options” in Iraq in 2002, or Egypt in 2004, or Palestine in 2005, discussions emanating out of Washington revealed scant acquaintance — or concern — with conditions on the ground. Sheer American will power cannot overcome such ignorance.<sup>129</sup>

Contrast that very sorry picture with this slim but fairly representative excerpt from Gülen himself:

<sup>123</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 97.

<sup>124</sup> There is a growing literature to suggest that the service organization founded by Gülen leads a new Puritanism in Anatolia; *v.*, *e.g.*, Selcuk Uygur, “Islamic Puritanism’ as a Case of Economic Development: the Case of the Gülen Movement,” in the Proceedings of the London conference, *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (Leeds: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, Oct 2007), 176-186 while there are marked comparisons with the capitalist emphasis of the Northern European Protestants in general and the Swiss-Dutch-Scottish-New England Presbyterians in particular, nonetheless, there are community values among the Anatolians, particularly the very strong emphases on community growth and neighborly responsibility, to say nothing of dialogue with other faiths, that are quite distinct from the patterns of Calvin’s Geneva or Winthrop’s Boston.

<sup>125</sup> El Fadl, *op. cit.*, 102.

<sup>126</sup> See, *e.g.*, Khaled Abou el Fadl, et al., *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy: A Boston Review Book*, ed. Joshua Cohen and Deborah Chasman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>127</sup> One author who has suggested that those authoritarian regimes have been more successfully entrenched than the political science and strategic literature generally realize is Steven A. Cook, *Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

<sup>128</sup> Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism* (NY: Vintage/Random House, 1979).

<sup>129</sup> (The Council on Foreign Relations has described the lack of a well developed, indigenous liberal leadership alternative in most Arab polities; Washington failed to grasp that point when it touted its great democracy initiative for the Middle East from 2002 to 2005; already, by 2006, the initiative was in retreat and potential liberal allies among the Arab intelligentsia were back where they started: silenced, imprisoned, even tortured. Washington’s emphasis on American will power and high-tech allure proved to be very thin reeds when pushed against the desperate politics of a culturally and theologically angered region.)



If Muslims want to end their long humiliation and help establish a new, happy world at least on a par with the West, they must replace old-fashioned positivistic and materialistic theories with their own thoughts and inspirations. Aware of their past pains and troubles, they must exert great efforts to define these problems and cure them.

A true concept of science will join spirituality and metaphysics with a comprehensive, inclusive view that affirms the intrinsic and unbreakable relation between any scientific discipline and existence as a whole. Only a concept embracing the whole in its wholeness can be called truly scientific.<sup>130</sup>

This is, indeed, far removed from 19<sup>th</sup>-century positivism; Gülen's sense of science per se accords well with the discoveries of Heisenberg and even late 20<sup>th</sup>-century chaos theory and complexity theory. And his sense of the whole is not only well grounded by analogy to the most advanced physics, but it also ties in, and very directly, with the genuine democratic aspirations of people of faith, Muslim or otherwise. In Western terms, we might distinguish his sense of theological democracy as one whereby a Catholic may appropriate to herself one after another of the great teachings of the Church, rather as John Henry Newman did: slowly, prayerfully, reasonably, resolving the difficulties without ever making them into doubts. In the Islamic literature, perhaps the most invigorating example of this is offered by Ihsan Yilmaz, "Inter-madhab Surfing."<sup>131</sup>

As Paul Weller has just observed, "...Gülen employs a hermeneutic which is more in line with the classical traditions of the interpretation of Islam, and quite different from the 'flat' approach of modern Islamists."<sup>132</sup>

At the same time, Gülen manages to keep a balance between his emphasis on the need for Muslims to become fully at home with contemporary science and the need for Muslim community leaders to develop those classical theological traditions anew. It is not merely a matter of Muslims becoming comfortable with a much more realistic sense of science than scientism ever afforded; nor is an awareness of current scientific methods and findings among well educated Turks sufficient to "balance" their expression of faith. The balance does not operate at all in that way. No individual maintains a bifurcated pair of horizons, one that would need to be constantly juggled. Instead, the balance that Gülen advocates is one that goes to the heart of each discipline: the chemistry professor should be every bit as immersed in his lab work as in his prayer life, and should not seek to construct an artificial divide between them, or, for that matter, an equally artificial set of premature parallels

<sup>130</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, "The Horizons of the Soul: Metaphysical Thought," in Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, Foreword by Thomas Michel (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2004), 148-151, at 150.

<sup>131</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz, "Inter-madhab Surfing, Neo-Ijtihad, and Faith-Based Movement Leaders," in *The Islamic School of Law: Evolution, Devolution, and Progress*, ed. Peri Bearman, Rudolph Peters, and Frank E. Vogel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 191 ff. Cf. Gülen, "Why Prophets Are Sent," in Gülen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad* (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2005), 21 ff. Cf. Gülen, "Divine Decree and Destiny, and Human Free Will," in *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith* (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2005), 89 ff. Cf. Thomas Michel, "Turkish Islam in Dialogue with Modern Society: the Neo-Sufi Spirituality of the Gülen Movement," in *Islam and Enlightenment: New Issues*, ed. Erik Borgman and Pim Valkenberg (London: SCM Press, 2005), 71-80.

<sup>132</sup> Paul Weller, "Robustness and Civility: Themes from Fethullah Gülen as Resource and Challenge for Government, Muslims and Civil Society in the United Kingdom," in the Proceedings of the London conference, *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of The Gülen Movement* (Leeds: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, Oct 2007), 268-284, at 280.



between them. The experience in each discipline, be it in pursuit of a new scientific result or in the most profound prayer (not “Here are my desires” prayer), yields its own intrinsic methods and results: the book of nature will point, in its own time and its own way, toward the book of Scripture. Although Islām rarely invokes a logic explicitly equivalent to that of natural law theory in the West, the sense of profound unity underpinning Creation and Revelation is nonetheless there: Prince Sultan and Gülen would agree that the abandonment of empirical research was first and foremost a failure to understand the unity of God’s complex Creation, a failure to honor each part of that Creation in its own terms.

It was the theological misunderstanding that, ever so subtly, entailed the decline and fall of the Islāmic world and, eventually, of its last and greatest power, the Ottoman empire. For the God Who calls upon all Muslims to “Recite!” immediately reminds them that He has given them the pen: He has given them the means to record *all* knowledge. *Allah’s first Revelation is, in short, a powerful call to mind the whole of Creation.* For the gift of the pen was unrestricted: the Prophet was not instructed by the Archangel to jot down the words of Revelation; indeed, Muhammad could not read or write. In that moment of fear and trembling – that experience of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (Otto) that Muhammad underwent, time and again, for years on end, fearing that he could not endure it, that he would be crushed by the Archangel, or by the burden of the revelations, or by the Meccans’ rejection of his message (Armstrong is very good on this) - the Prophet was at no point concerned to stop and scribble. That is not why the Archangel led off with the pen. Muhammad was scarcely likely to forget what he heard if he did not “jot it down” – Revelation is not a shopping list - jotting cannot, under any interpretation, be the meaning of the pen.

Sometimes, the import of the symbolism is buried in plain sight. Recall the “Aha!” moment of St. Augustine who, after years of frustration in reading and re-reading the twin accounts of Creation, set forth at the beginning of Genesis, suddenly realized that the poetic description there, even within the admittedly broad interpretive span of mythopoetry, is not a declaration of a once-for-all sequence of six 24-hour days of divine labor (as it were: the divine “Fiat!” is not labor, but Sophia, divine wisdom, certainly permits us to use the image of Her at work). Rivers do not suddenly teem with fish; reeds along the riverbanks take time to grow; animals even take years to mature and reproduce; Genesis is not an image of a static Creation, where everything bursts out in full growth, as Athena bursts from the head of Zeus: no, Creation is the setting in motion of all things; Creation is, in a measure, continuous; so much was now clear to Augustine, and it was again tested and accepted as virtually unconditioned by Aquinas; now if the West had pursued Augustine’s insight and understanding and had judged its potential aright in the natural sciences in the High Middle Ages, as it took up empiricism from its Muslim and Jewish forebears, then the agonies of the Victorian era and the idiocies of the creationist fundamentalists could all have been averted: if, and only if, Medieval scientists had matched their inquiries into the natural world to the sophistication of their theology.

The West had the implication of ongoing Creation – and missed it for ages. The East had the implication of the pen – and missed it for ages.

Neither East nor West took its theology seriously enough to apply it to the whole. Neither of us minded Creation as God suggested we should. But the divine suggestion was just that: a small voice the night, an invitation.



It becomes clear that there was a dim but persistent popular grasp of the import of the pen: witness the popular but informal hadith that we should pursue knowledge “even to China.” The whole world, human and natural, bears witness to the glory and the complex care of God.

Such a world is very, very complex and multifaceted. But even so, it has no room for the preaching of hatred against one’s neighbors or of despair for oneself.

To mind the whole is to be not only true to one’s theology and to one’s science, it is to be true to one’s heart and mind. For to mind the world is to refuse to condemn any part of it, be it the neighbor’s power or one’s own powerlessness.

To mind the whole is to discover that, for all our differences of belief and speech, our minds and hearts function in precisely the same way. Each and every one of us undergoes, each and every day, the immemorial process of experience, insight, understanding, judgment, and decision.

Undergoing that process, we have the opportunity to turn, at every moment, and see that our horizon of inquiry is unlimited: it is made for infinity, it is made in the image of God. Our hearts and minds will not rest until they rest in God.

And with that realization, with Augustine and Gülen, we discover that there is no place in this world for a “clash of civilizations” — that the lifespan of a reed, or the power of the pen that is made from it, attests at once to the foresight and the continuity of God’s Creation: the reed that becomes the pen that inscribes the subatomic particles making up the reed — this is deep knowledge, and if we are graced, this is even deeper awe, and wonder, and, finally, love.

It is said that there is no real knowledge of the part without antecedent knowledge of the whole. As Socrates points out at the end of the *Theaetetus*, there is no knowledge of the circle by its parts: for is it just two semi-circles? But then what are they, if not four quarter circles? And what are they ... *reductio ad absurdum!*

It is even more properly said that there is no knowledge of the whole without love. For such knowledge comes only through great labor.

We struggle to grasp an iota of the complexity of Creation: a jot and a tittle. And in our jotting, there is joy; but the greatest joy of all, as in a cave outside Mecca, requires no jotting whatsoever: the joy of the presence of God.

Gülen has renewed that call to joy like no one else in Muslim Modernity. He stands alongside the spiritual giants in the House of Islām, great souls like Rumi and Yunus Emre. Like them, he speaks directly to the needs of our age; like them, he speaks for all time.

## 5. **Tout ce qui monte, converge.**

It was a French paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J, who observed, “Everything that rises, converges.”

If we attend to our own processes of heart and mind, if we follow our own unrestricted desires to know and be known, to love and be loved, if we accept once again that our horizons (unlike our attainments) are infinite, then we can understand, and affirm that understanding with judgment and



lifetime decision, with Teilhard and Gülen, that Allāh, in His infinite wisdom, has created our diversity the better that we may compete with one another – compete in goodness.

Not all will agree with us. Some, whether power-mongers or victims of fear, will persecute the likes of Gülen. Even when he most practices what he preaches – as sublime as that practice can be.<sup>133</sup> And that is when we can affirm our own understanding of Gülen, affirm it to be virtually unconditioned, for no more questions obtain, affirm it for this ultimate reason – “Despite the hardships that Gülen faced during the process of accusations, spiritual persecution and exile, he never sought revenge.”<sup>134</sup>

Beyond the three reasons for his being an important historical figure, reasons that are already well articulated in the literature, Gülen stands forth ultimately as a man of infinite peace – a man of God.

And that is why the West should come to know him. There is no greater accolade, no greater power, for there is no greater invitation.

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<sup>133</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz, “Ijtihad and Tajdid by Conduct: the Gülen Movement,” in M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, eds., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 208-237.

<sup>134</sup> Zeki Saritoprak, “Gülen and His Global Contribution to Peace-Building,” in the Proceedings of the London conference, *Muslim World*, op. cit., 632-642, at 639.