



## **FROM 'NEW MAN' TO 'WORLD CITIZEN': THE REPLICATION OF FETHULLAH GÜLEN'S RENEWAL VISION IN THE DUTCH CONTEXT**

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### **Abstract**

This research<sup>590</sup> elaborates the question of what the vision of Fethullah Gülen is with regard to renewal and modernization, what the historical context is for this vision and what relevance this has for the Dutch context. First of all we note that modernization was a necessity in Turkey to catch up with the Western world and avoid the risk of being exploited by 'more civilized' nations. As a result of the reforms in the Turkish top-down modernization, the role of religion (Islam) in the public domain was marginalized. In his vision Fethullah Gülen is challenging this interpretation of modernization. He argues that in fact it is diminishing the role of historical and religious values that leads to a weakening of the Turkish nation, because in this way it loses its identity and is subjugated by materialism. As a solution he sees the hope of a renewal of the nation through a 'golden generation' of young people who have secured their identity in line with their history or belief but who are at the same time well educated, specially in modern sciences, and so form a lead group willing to engage in sustained service to humanity. In this way they can serve as an example function to the wider society of unity and common purpose around shared values, which help that society to achieve the unity of common purpose and so be an example to the world as a whole. In the Dutch context it seems that the people are mainly sympathetic to this vision and opposed to the Dutch sub-categorization. The Gülen Movement's members are striving to put people with different backgrounds, who usually live alongside each other, in dialogue and let them work together on shared goals. The Movement is socially very active in its mission of serving humanity regardless of ethnicity, religion and culture, in the hope that this will reflect on the Dutch society. Some of its members have even expressed their expectation that, in this manner, the Netherlands, as a diverse but peaceful society, will become a role model for other countries. In this respect the paper emphasizes the development and participation of the Turkish community as a pioneer group in Dutch society and in the development of Dutch youth into 'world citizens', tolerant towards other beliefs and cultures, a programme fully in line with the vision of Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen Movement's role models.

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<sup>590</sup> This paper is a result and recapitulation of author's research conducted in the spring of 2007 under supervision of professor Erik-Jan Zürcher at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands.



## 1. Introduction

Modernization, secularism, democracy: these are all important issues for us in the Western world, but for sure in Turkey as well. Even more than in Europe, modernization in Turkey was already an important issue and a necessity in the nineteenth century. Why? Turkey, then the Ottoman Empire, found itself in a difficult position. For centuries the Ottoman state had been powerful and seemed insuperable, but from the early 1800s the tide had begun to turn. After the industrial revolution in the West, the Ottoman Empire was confronted with a renewed Europe that had leapt forward in the area of science and technology.

In a modernizing world such renewal is a pre-condition for national survival without loss of independence and domination by the so-called 'civilized nations'. Modernization was also the reference point in the ideology that was espoused in order to liberate Turkey from Western domination — Kemalism — introduced through the leader of Turkey's war of independence and founder of the modern Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Kemalism is an enlightening ideology, with the goal of raising a generation with free minds, freedom of conscience and freedom of knowledge.<sup>591</sup> According to Atatürk, this attitude was the foundation of Western successes in the scientific arena and would now prove to be the key for the success of Turkey as well. This success would guarantee it a place among the family of 'civilized nations'.

## 2. Turkey as Indivisible Unity

Religion was seen by the modernizing Kemalist elite as the great obstacle to that goal. The dogmas embedded in religion were bound, according to Kemalism, to prevent people from critical, scientific reasoning. Moreover, religion was bound to lead to divisions — during the later Ottoman era it had already been demonstrated how its different constituent communities (called '*millets*') could be exploited to justify and enable foreign intervention.

Atatürk had concrete plans to take care of this threatening diversity stemming from religion. Under the influence of the European model of the nation state, it was decided that Turkey should form an indivisible unitary state identified with a territory and a people and with Turkish as its national language.<sup>592</sup> This ambition for unity was reflected in the establishment of a Directorate of Religious Affairs that would decide what the correct explanation of Islam was and control all appointments to religious office in the country. That is why, even now, all religious officials in Turkey are government employees. That brings up the question of what the separation of church and state means in Turkey in this case. It was clear for Atatürk that secularism means that the state implements the definition of Islam as 'the religion of understanding and reason of modern Turks'; all other dimensions of religious belief and affiliation are matters for private conscience, excluded from public concern.

<sup>591</sup> Sina Akşin, 'The nature of the Kemalist revolution' in David Shankland (ed.), *The Turkish Republic at 75 Years* (Cambridge, 1999), 14–28 at 17.

<sup>592</sup> Article 3 in the Constitution of Turkey: 'Türkiye Devleti, ülkesi ve milletiyle bölünmez bir bütündür.'



### 3. Risale-i Nur

In the first years of the Republic when everything other than state-sanctioned expressions of religion were kept out of the public domain, *Risale-i Nur* was written. This Qur'an commentary had the goal of equipping all faithful Muslims and any doubting ones to hold onto Islam through the challenges of modern times.

This commentary was written by Said Nursi, an Islamic thinker viewed as a dissident by the regime, and who therefore spent the greater part of his life in prison or in exile. According to Nursi this treatment was unjust, because he complied with the rules of the game — that religion should be restricted to private conscience. He challenged the accusations laid against him by arguing that what he aimed at was in fact individual, private conscience and nothing else; that his discourses were based on inspiring and encouraging individual, personal consciences, as well as emphasizing that, in these days, it is not sufficient to have faith through imitation (*taklidi iman*). In these days what is needed is a faith through personal quest and individual research (*tahkiki iman*).<sup>593</sup>

That is why he tried to make people aware through his exposition of the Qur'an that science and religion should be combined; that science should not be eschewed on the basis that revealed books like the Qur'an and other revelations have already provided the answers to all questions. One should, on the contrary, focus on science in order to gain insight through the 'book of the universe' into the reality that scientifically established facts do not undermine religious insights; rather, they subtly affirm and illustrate them.

Despite the obstacles put in the way of Said Nursi's work, the number of people who smuggled his writings and commentaries on the Qur'an out of prison, then made multiple copies of them in secret and distributed them, increased. They were called the 'Disciples of Light' (*Nur talebeleri*).

The young Fethullah Gülen, who was studying Islamic theology in the provincial city of Erzurum became acquainted with some of these 'Disciples of Light' and the work of Said Nursi, the *Risale-i Nur*, in 1960, shortly before Nursi's death. The *Risale-i Nur* must have made a big impression on him because many elements of it can be found in the vision that he would develop in the following years. As a teacher in a Qur'an school in the big city İzmir, in the years after his study, Gülen strove to enliven the personal belief experience of young people.

As a preacher he knew how to touch people in such a way that they made funds available for summer camps, for example, where young people could be guided in their studies, but where there was room too for open discussions about religious and social subjects. He also encouraged his sympathizers to rent houses where students could stay, the so called 'Light Houses' (*Işık evleri*), establish dormitories and later — in the period between 1980 and 1995 when Turkish politics followed a liberal course — for private educational institutions and schools.<sup>594</sup>

<sup>593</sup> Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford, 2003), 157–60.

<sup>594</sup> '1971–1979/1980–1988 Hayat Kronolojisi' at <http://tr.fGülen.com/content/view/3500/5/> ; <http://tr.fGülen.com/content/view/3499/5/>.



#### 4. Gülen-Inspired-Schools

With the fall of the Iron Curtain the group of people inspired by the vision of Fethullah Gülen (the Gülen Movement) focused on Central Asia, which was a religious and ideological vacuum after the fall of communism. In Central Asia and world-wide schools were set up that had the same curriculum as the state schools and with a neutral, rather than any overtly religious or Islamic, character, the 'Gülen schools'.

Sources from 1998 mention 150 schools and 250 other institutions in Turkey, and 250 schools including 7 universities, mainly in Central Asia and the Balkans, but also in the Philippines and in Africa.<sup>595</sup> Although there are conspiracy theories about how educational institutions on this scale are financed, Fethullah Gülen has always made clear that these are an initiative and a result of generous Turkish citizens and of the self-sacrifice of volunteers, like the teachers who are willing to work at (or at less than) minimum wage. What then is this vision of Fethullah Gülen that appeals to so many people and that leads to such results?

It turns out that, in certain respects, it is rather like Kemalism, in that it tries to deal with the dilemma: How do we Turks hold our identity as Turks and secure our position in the world? In Gülen's way of dealing with it the word 'Turks' denotes mainly the Islamic community; and for him, the term 'identity' refers not only to being ethnically or linguistically Turkish, but also (indeed, mainly) to the Turks' Islamic identity and the ethical values linked to it.<sup>596</sup>

The Islam that Fethullah Gülen preaches is in fact not necessarily a dogmatic Islam to which religious rules are central.<sup>597</sup> It is more of a mystical Islam, one that aims at personal development of the individual, of a good human being who matures in the qualities esteemed by everyone— qualities like loving one's fellow human beings, courage, modesty and the willingness to do something altruistically, for the benefit of others. Besides, Fethullah Gülen is known to many people as the face of tolerant and liberal Islam. He is therefore presented as a champion of dialogue, with goodwill and tolerance towards people of other cultures and beliefs. He visited the Pope in 1998, which was seen as a good example of his practising the principles he preached.

#### 5. A Threat to Democracy?

It was astonishing then that in 1999 tapes came in at the Turkish television broadcaster ATV, in which this universally esteemed and respected teacher ('Hoca Efendi') seems to call his disciples to wait for the right moment to seize power in Turkey. The public prosecutor opened a lawsuit to investigate Fethullah Gülen on the basis of the charge of 'founding an illegal organization aiming to change the structure of the secular state, in order to found a state based on religious laws'.<sup>598</sup>

<sup>595</sup> Unal Bilir, 'Turkey Islam: Recipe for Success or Hindrance to the Integration of the Turkish Diaspora Community in Germany' in: *Journal of Muslim Minority affairs*, 24 (2004): 259-83 at 264.

<sup>596</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, 'The Gülen Movement' in Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State* (New York, 2003), 21-47, at 24.

<sup>597</sup> Ünal Bilir, 'Turkey Islam', 269

<sup>598</sup> Nuh Mete Yüksel, Fethullah Gülen örgütü hakkında iddianame at [http://www.belgenet.com/dava/Gulendava\\_04.html#1](http://www.belgenet.com/dava/Gulendava_04.html#1)



Were these well-founded accusations, or were they an act of hostility on the part of the Turkish state? There are arguments for the latter explanation, expressed by members of the Gülen community. In regard to the accusations it is only proper to note that the state has always had the monopoly on the definition of Islam, as well as of important concepts like democracy and secularism. Indeed, Hakan Yavuz argues that one of the reasons for the hostility on the part of the Turkish state may have been the establishment of the 'Journalists and Writers Foundation', which is traced back to the Gülen community. This Foundation seemed to have the potential to win over the Turkish cultural and commercial elite, through involvement in shared projects aiming at the formulation of a 'social contract'.<sup>599</sup>

The importance of the ideas that the state favours — democracy, secularism and modernization — is recognized by Fethullah Gülen and he says he supports them. Why then is he being accused of being a threat to those ideas, and even accused of striving for an Islamic state? In the so called 'Abant Declarations' published by the Journalists and Writers Foundation subjects like 'Islam and secularism' are clearly presented and not in any way that contradicts the meaning or content of concepts like modernity, Islam and democracy, the definition of which the state monopolizes.

Now, Fethullah Gülen himself acknowledges the value of ideas like modernization, secularism and democracy, but he tries also to discuss their content and to give them a provenance and meaning different from that given by the 'Kemalists'. Thus, for him 'democracy' is an idea, a value, that is inherent to Islam. According to him the Turkish people need a higher type of democracy than the present one; a democracy that offers more room to the spiritual (religious/Islamic) faculties, of which in his view the people are in need. 'Secularism' envisages that the state will not interfere in the religious experience of its citizens, so that it can 'create a climate where everyone can sow his ideas unhindered and harvest its crop'.<sup>600</sup>

Fethullah Gülen's vision is, in itself, an alternative form of modernization. As we said earlier, modernization seems to be a necessary condition for maintaining the right to sustain independent existence in this world, without being oppressed or taken advantage of by the so-called 'civilized nations', without having to relinquish one's own identity in exchange for a 'civilized culture'. It is interesting that this is the starting point as much of the Kemalist vision as it is of that of Fethullah Gülen. Both want to avoid dependency and being dominated, but at the same time their ideas about how to achieve that differ strongly. Fethullah Gülen has sharp criticisms of the results of the type of modernization that Atatürk strove for. He does not blame Atatürk for this, because according to him Atatürk had the same opinion as himself, only he was understood in a wrong way and it was presented to the people in a wrong way.<sup>601</sup>

<sup>599</sup> Hakan Yavuz, 'The Gülen Movement', 42

<sup>600</sup> Reha Muhtar's interview with Fethullah Gülen, 12-09-2001 at <http://tr.fGülen.com/content/view/222/5/06-03-2007>.

<sup>601</sup> Taha Akyol and Cengiz Çandar's interview with Fethullah Gülen, 27-02-1998 for NTV, at <http://tr.fGülen.com/content/view/1464/74/>.



## 6. Imitation of Western modernity

According to Fethullah Gülen, the example of the ideal is to be found in the situation that obtained in the first centuries after the appearance of the Prophet, and again during the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire. According to him, in those days the Islamic society was seen as the most ethical and developed in the world. The Muslims were able to develop a tremendous governing body because they were able to appreciate the value of (as he calls it) 'the tripartite foundation of inspiration, rationality and experience'.<sup>602</sup> Their moral excellence and progressiveness, relatively to the time they lived in, were due to the traditions and structures that made them stop and reflect on the transitoriness of the earthly life and the reality of the eternal one. Accordingly, people were able to focus on the value of immaterial goods like science, knowledge and the defence of law and justice.<sup>603</sup> This was the reason why they seemed destined to rule in the world. However, the moral and spiritual legacy that promised them authority in the world was wasted in that they sacrificed their religious values in favour of the hope of greater worldly prosperity. In point of fact the escape of imitating Western modernity made the Turkish nation vulnerable, because that is how they lost their identity and became a slave and puppet of the West: 'We have made one of the most unforgivable mistakes of history— sacrificing our religion in return for prosperity. We accepted a way of thinking in which this worldly life is regarded as superior to religion. Since that moment on, we have been struggling to get out of the web of impossibilities in which we have been trapped. Religion is long gone, but the expected worldly prosperity has not been obtained.'<sup>604</sup>

The result, according to Gülen, is dependency, with Turkey obliged to seek to please the West at all costs; moreover, the Turkish people find themselves in a miserable state because of their addiction to materialism.

Although according to the Kemalist ideology a human can only be free if religion is deprived of influence in the public sphere, Fethullah Gülen points out that the opposite is the case. Because of the missing influence of religion, modern man becomes a slave to his greed and primitive drives, and to other selfish fellow human beings who exploit him. The pursuit of ever greater worldly comfort consumes ever more of a person's energy, and takes away the peace and serenity that, according to Gülen, finds its roots in a religious life. Nor does this make the person, from a scientific point of view, more objective, because, being ruled by selfishness, he seeks and manipulates knowledge primarily in order to serve material wants.<sup>605</sup>

What is the solution according to Gülen? The solution, like the problem, again resembles the goals of Kemalism in many ways, but the content is completely different: his solution is to raise a new generation of people who are truly free. Not freed from the influence of religion so as to think and act in an unfettered, abandoned way, but free through the notion that they are servants of God, who are bound to obey only His commands and who, therefore, need not bow before other kinds of power. Free because they are aware of the reality that the core of belief is to strive for God's approval, so they are enabled to free themselves from worldly desires. And free to do scientific research in an honest way because in their quest they are not manipulated by their own interests, so they can seek and apply

<sup>602</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Ruhumuzun heykelini dikerken* (The status of our souls; Ulm 2003), 1–2.

<sup>603</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Zamanın altın dilimi* (The golden period of time; Ulm 2003), 55–58.

<sup>604</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Ruhumuzun heykelini dikerken*, 7.

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, 23.



knowledge for the good of the whole of humanity. Moreover, they take a broader view of science, a holistic view, because in their scientific research, they consult, as well as the book of the universe, the book of the religion also, and so they can obtain deeper insights. This new generation of people will be active, dynamic — not in the pursuit of luxury — in the pursuit of the approval of God, which is obtained through loving all creatures for the sake of the Creator, so that they become and remain ever-conscious of their responsibilities towards their fellow human beings, the wider society and the world.

## 7. The ‘New Man’

Just as the Kemalist elite sought to implement their own type of modernization in Turkey, so too do Gülen and those who follow his way. He is convinced that the masses will not be able to implement far-reaching changes in their present condition. For that to happen, people of insight are needed, who will serve as pioneers. He expresses his expectations on this point as follows:

‘Out of the masses that are wandering behind people without the capability of reasoning and sound thinking or following fantasies, as if they were sleepwalkers, a New Man will arise. This man will be able to think in a modern and rational way, and he will put his trust not only in the mind but also in his experiences and he believes as much in inspiration and conscience as in those two.’<sup>606</sup>

According to Gülen, the ‘New Man’ generation, as he calls them, are heroes, loyal to their own cultural and religious values, but also developed in all fields and in harmony with the time in which they live. These are people who, inside themselves, have realized a dialogue between elements that are perceived as opposites by modernity: heart and mind, feeling and logic. They are people who focus on the present world and at the same time keep their hearts and minds on the next.

The ‘New Man’ deploys himself using all these elements in order to become an enlightening example to others in all walks of life, including the social, scientific and technological. He does this through radiating ethical values and professionalism at the same time. Because the ‘New Man’ is a ‘peacemaker’, he also enters into dialogue with the rest of the society. His goal is to unite the diverse components of society around shared values like virtuousness, decency, diligence and being helpful to others. If the ‘New Man’ succeeds in this, a prosperous and peaceful society will emerge through dialogue and through the persuasiveness of practical examples of service to others.

If such an effort succeeds in the case of the Turkish nation, this nation can become an example to the rest of the world, and at the same time demonstrate that Islam offers solutions where merely political or economic ideologies fail. Instead of being like the ignored child who is set to one side, the Turkish people can become a pioneering nation able to unite the world around shared values, so that eventually a peaceful world can come about — not through repression of the beliefs and cultural traditions of others, but by winning hearts and minds through the influence of a good model of service

The emphasis that Gülen puts on the importance of education is completely in line with this general mission. He says that an ideal community, society or world consists of ideal individuals. Ideal individuals come to be through self-development, but especially through the example that they imbibe

<sup>606</sup> M. Fethullah Gülen, *Ruhumuzun heykelini dikerken* Ibid, 17.



from a teacher, one who radiates knowledge and excellence and enables them to realize and fulfil their potential to follow the same path.

## 8. Gülen's Vision in the Dutch Context

What is the relevance of this vision of Fethullah Gülen in the Dutch context? Does it, can it, have any application in the Netherlands? In summary, Gülen's vision seems to envisage an alternative to the type of modernization in Turkey that is geared to a rigorous secularism. The Netherlands (by contrast with Kemalist Turkey) is a very liberal country, offering a lot of space to different beliefs. Let us not forget that, as elsewhere, in the Netherlands this openness was not achieved without effort. The influences of the French Revolution were felt for a long time in the Netherlands so that it too strove to become a unitary nation-state, as illustrated by King Willem I commanding the Reformed Church to nurture 'love for King and Country'.<sup>607</sup> This is quite comparable to the way the present Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs takes particular care to ensure that Islam serves national consciousness.

In the Netherlands it was the so-called 'separatists' who were against this drive for unitary nationhood and who were convinced that there is 'a dependency on God, which makes [one] independent of the state'.<sup>608</sup>

After that Abraham Kuyper was one of those who acted against measures to expel Christianity from the public domain. He pleaded against uniformity in the public domain and on behalf of diversity, arguing that 'citizens would be more loyal to a government that would allow them to live according to their own beliefs, than to a state that wanted to pour them into the same mould, and that therefore the public domain should be open to every philosophy of life and not only the reasonable ones'.<sup>609</sup> Ever since, the Netherlands has been a composite society divided by different beliefs, each given the opportunity to found its own schools, foundations, hospitals, help organizations etc.

During my research on the Gülen movement in the Netherlands, I was surprised to find that this tendency to form and live in sub-groups, still very much present in the Netherlands because of its particular historical background, was the very thing that the people that I interviewed found most awkward.

Of course, some of the people that I spoke to in the Netherlands and who said they were inspired by the vision of Fethullah Gülen, also stressed other problems that, in their view, Dutch society was facing. One of their concerns was that the capitalist system, according to them, ignores the people's need for spiritual nourishment and education — something that is reflected in the growing number of psychological problems among the Dutch people, the growing number of divorces, and the lack of respect for the elderly because they are no longer economically productive. But the principal concern was the lack of mutual openness and exchange between the various sub-groups. People in the

<sup>607</sup> George Harinck, 'Een leefbare oplossing, Katholieke en Protestantse tradities en de scheiding van kerk en staat' in Marcel ten Hooven and Theo de Wit (eds.), *Ongewenste Goden. De publieke rol van religie in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2006), 106–30, at 107.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>609</sup> Marcel ten Hooven, 'Religie verdeelt Nederland' in Marcel ten Hooven and Theo de Wit (eds.), *Ongewenste Goden. De publieke rol van religie in Nederland*, 13–37, at 36.



Netherlands live alongside each other, isolated in their own world, so that there are many groups in a splendid diversity — the Turkish community is one of these groups — but they live *next to* each other without really living *together with* each other.

## 9. Tolerance and Dialogue

But how does this relate to the Gülen vision? Well, in the lack of tolerance that the different separate groups show at times of crisis occurs (for example 9/11), there is an evident parallel with the situation in Turkey. There are tensions between different groups (Kurds, Turkish Sunnis and Alawis, Armenians) because the government has sought to impose a uniform identity on its citizens, as if it meant to say: 'You will be Turkish and speak Turkish and you shall never ever divide our country because of divergent convictions'.

Gülen's answer to this is, as we saw, an effort to be tolerant through the love of God, expressing love and being of help to all creatures, to enter into dialogue in order to find out what is important for everyone, so that collectively it can be striven for.

In the Dutch context everything appears to be sorted out: everyone has the right of freedom of speech, and there is space made for every possible conviction, and yet this is not the ideal picture of integration in the eyes of everyone. From the point of view of Gülen's vision, a few people hold that the fact that people experience their own identity in their own sub-group undermines mutual tolerance and prevents dialogue about shared problems and prevents collaboration to achieve shared goals, which would lead to unity while preserving different identities. Therefore, what they propose is to know one's own identity and encourage the exchange of the richness in that identity with the different richness of other groups.<sup>610</sup>

How is this ideal to be practised in the Netherlands? Some of my interviewees said they were convinced that self-development towards the ideal of a perfected human being (*insan-i kâmil*) is the highest priority.<sup>611</sup> This was especially the case for the Turkish and other communities of Muslims in the Netherlands, who (according to the majority of my interviewees) were impeded by their poor level of development relative to the main society.<sup>612</sup> The ideal expressed by these interviewees is that Muslims should understand the very first command of the Qur'an (*iqra* in Arabic, translated in Turkish as '*oku*', meaning not only 'recite' but also 'read' and 'study') as an imperative addressed to themselves, namely: study and develop yourself through deepening in understanding of the book of the universe and the book of the religion, to become a human being who has developed the heart, head and hands.<sup>613</sup> 'Hands' are included with the meaning of agency, of being active — because they recognize the importance of their personal responsibility towards the wider (Dutch) society. They do so through awareness of the transitoriness of this life and the reality of the eternal, through the acceptance that a human being is not the outright owner of his qualities, skills and talents, but a steward who is supposed to use those qualities for the benefit of humanity and not only to satisfy his

<sup>610</sup> Author's interview, 14-03-2007, with 'Mahmut' (pseud.).

<sup>611</sup> Author's interview, 17-04-2007 with Gürkan Çelik.

<sup>612</sup> Author's interviews, 26-02-2007, 13-03-2007, 16-04-2007 and 14-03-2007, with, respectively, Yusuf Alan, Alaattin Erdal, Ahmet Taşkan and 'Mahmut' (pseud.).

<sup>613</sup> Author's interviews, 26-02-2007, 13-03-2007 and 14-03-2007, with, respectively, Yusuf Alan, Alaattin Erdal and 'Mahmut' (pseud.).



own material needs.<sup>614</sup> Full development and consciousness of this kind must surely lead the Turkish and Muslim citizens of the Netherlands to be of more help and service to their fellow-citizens. Thereafter, they will surely go on to send out their message, because playing a full part in society and the possibility of influencing the world around you are closely related, indeed two sides of the same coin.

## 10. Being a Good Example

Being a good example to others was understood as the means to reach the primary goals. Being a role model is a constant theme in Gülen's vision, which can be traced in the independent foundations set up in the Netherlands by people who have let themselves be inspired by Gülen's vision. You can find role models and 'mental trainers' in the students association Cosmicus and in a few educational centres in big cities in the Netherlands — 'trainers' who want to encourage Turkish young people to do better, go higher. You can find role models in the Cosmicus College, which wants to encourage young people to develop themselves as world citizens — as people who have the right qualities and who are appreciated all over the world — altruistic people who are secure in their own identity, but who also happen to be able to develop themselves so that they release that identity and their own story to the rest of the world, to people of different culture and different belief.

You can find role models in the newspaper *Zaman*, that wants to improve the participation of Turkish Dutch citizens in their society — by, on the one hand, making them aware of Dutch realities and, on the other hand, by motivating them through presentation of appropriate role models — successful female Turkish entrepreneurs, academics and students — to demonstrate what is possible.<sup>615</sup>

By being active in this way, it is possible for the people who are inspired by the vision of Fethullah Gülen to join in everything that the Dutch society expects of its Turkish Muslim citizens. Let us take the slogan of the new administration: 'Work together, live together'. The efforts of these Gülen-inspired people fits smoothly with that. Dialogue, tolerance, working together and participation are ideals that are indeed universally valued. Then, those who join in so well have the room to add their own content to these ideals, making it possible for others to come to understand them even as they know and hold onto their own identity. They do this not only in order to have a way of existing in Dutch society, but also, beyond that, in order to be an example, hopeful that this example may be followed by their fellow-citizens so that they too can participate in a dialogue and no longer focus only on their own interests, so that they too may become self-sacrificing servants of their fellow human beings.

If as a result the different groups in Dutch society come, over time, to live peacefully with each other, if it is proven that this concept works, then the Netherlands can be a role model for the whole world, since the Netherlands, with all its diversity, is a reflection in miniature of the diversity of the world as a whole. Then, if that example takes root in the wider world, we can make it into a place of peaceful coexistence, free from suspicion, mistrust and conflict.<sup>616</sup> That high ideal can be sought after on the

<sup>614</sup> Author's e-mail correspondence, 31-03-2007, with Yusuf Alan about the article *Kimim ben?* at: <http://www.zamanhollanda.nl/haberdetay.asp?id=540>.

<sup>615</sup> Author's interview, 13-03-2007, with Alaattin Erdal.

<sup>616</sup> My interview, 12-04-2007, with 'Cemal' (pseud.).



basis of universal principles and values that, according to the Gülen Movement, find their origin in Islam.

## 11. Concluding Remarks

What to make of all this? It very much depends on one's personal beliefs.

As a Christian I recognize in this whole story many of the elements of my own faith. I also recognize the influence of my 'Abraham Kuyperian' background in my way of thinking, because a uniform society or world on the pattern of a unitary nation state is my greatest fear.

The Turkish and Dutch reality seem to have proven that the world and humanity are not 'built' to be uniform; rather, they exist within the grace of diversity. A society where people are focused on knowledge and spiritual values, instead of material things and personal interests, and one that is based on appreciating one's own identity, exchange and working together, seems to me much more attractive. Loving, being mutually helpful, and working together are indeed universal values that are more likely lead to peaceful coexistence than consumerism or national pride.

What I might be critical about in this vision is that the important principles in it that are supposed to lead to peace lack the foundation that they have for me as a Christian. I cannot see Islam as the basic origin of these principles because, for me, they find their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus. Consider, for example, the ideal of service (*hizmet*), which makes you an example for others. It is a fact that the influence that such service exerts is far stronger and more real than the effect of top-down power. Jesus is for me the ultimate example of one who rejected earthly power and choose the way of serving by choosing the cross for the sake of humanity; to make it possible for peace to enter between God and man, so that people enter into dialogue not only with one another but also and especially with God Himself. So that His Holy Spirit as 'mental trainer' can come to dwell in man, to make a 'New Man' out of him, serving others according to His example.<sup>617</sup>

For me it is difficult to understand how you can be an example to others of the love of God, if you have not first seen for yourself what the example of love of God means for you. How can you sacrifice for the interest of others if you have not first experienced how God shows His love by sacrificing Himself for you?

However, I would counsel everyone, regardless of what belief they hold, and are concerned about the growth of the influence of the Gülen movement, or of Islam or whatever conviction it may be, to study the example of the Gülen movement. Instead of complaining, look into the mirror and ask yourself what you have done by way of striving whole-heartedly for the well-being of your fellow human beings. For sure they are more likely to be open to the influence of those who earn the right to have such influence.

In some sense everyone's particular view of life will determine the way a vision like that of Fethullah Gülen is received and interpreted. Maybe that could be an interesting new topic for research.

<sup>617</sup> Ephesians, 2:13–20.