

“Religions, Globalisation and Dialogue in the 21st Century.

Fethullah Gülen and Arnold J. Toynbee:

“A Comparative Conversation with Contemporary Realities”

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Introduction

The conference aims to explore the appeal, meaning, and impact of Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen movement on Turkish, regional, and - increasingly - global societies, with reference also to the more general position of Islam in the contemporary world. Within this overall topic, this particular paper intends to make a contribution to the specific conference theme of “interfaith and intercultural dialogue, tolerance and peace” in a global context.

It will do this by bringing Fethullah Gülen’s teaching on religion, globalisation and dialogue into a comparative conversation with the thought of the historian Arnold J. Toynbee, as mediated by the writer’s reference to the contemporary situation. Gülen’s work and thought is not as well known as it should be in the ‘Western’ world and one of the main aims of this conference is to make it more widely known. This is of particular importance at this time, especially for those in the general public who know little of Islam and perceive it only in terms of ‘fundamentalism’, or obscurantism, or by association with terrorism.

Toynbee was a prodigious author (see Morton, 1980) who became very well known to the European and North American public during the heyday of his fame in the 1950s but whose work has, since his death in 1975, become relatively marginalized. Yet it is the argument of this paper there is much within Toynbee’s work that resonates with, and can also illuminate, aspects of Gülen’s thinking and work, and that the thinking of both are pertinent to our current global context.

Biographical Contexts: Gulen and Toynbee

In many respects, Gülen and Toynbee are historically, culturally and religiously and biographically quite different figures. Fethullah Gülen (1938-) can be seen as a product

of the 'East', having been born in Turkey, and having been formed by Islam in such a way that it has been a constant and fixed point of reference for his own personal life, his interpretation of the world, his teaching and his actions.

By contrast, Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) was a product of the 'West', born in Victorian England into what he (Toynbee, in Peper, ed., 1986: 19) later described as "an ordinary Anglican upbringing at home and school". But between the ages of 18 and 41 he says that he "drifted" into a position of "disbelief in the existence of any transcendental reality, life or personality" until a personal life crisis gave him an experience of divine reality that, thereafter, profoundly shaped his interpretation of history and of contemporary affairs.

Unlike Toynbee, who was an individual whose thought and writing was more prominent than his life, Gülen is not only an individual (for more biographical details than can be presented here, see Ünal and Williams, 2000a: 1-42) but, in his life as well as his teaching, is the inspirational figure for an emerging movement that originally took shape in the Turkey of the late 20th century but is now found throughout many parts of the world. Gülen was born in the village of Korucuk in Erzurum province, in eastern Turkey, in 1938. He is an Islamic scholar, thinker and writer who, by 1953, he had become a government preacher. In 1958 he took up a teaching position at a mosque in Edirne before moving to Izmir where the movement relating to his teaching began to emerge and became known to some as the "Izmir Community" (see Aras and Caha, 2000: 31). He retired from formal duties in 1981 but, in the period 1988-1991, gave a series of sermons as preacher emeritus at some of Turkey's most famous mosques.

Having emerged from a traditional background of training in religion Gülen has sought to make a connection between the inheritance of Islam as it has developed in the Turkish cultural context and the modern, 'westernised' and globalised world. As the editor of Gülen's book, Towards a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance, M. Enes Ergene (in Gülen, 2004a: viii) explains it in the Introduction to that book: "Gülen's model is...the essence of the synthesis created by the coming together of Turkish culture with Islam" and is especially a development of the Sufi tradition in which Gülen "re-generates this tolerant interpretation and understanding of Muslim-Turkish Sufism within contemporary circumstances, albeit highlighting a broader, more active, and more socially oriented vision.... Gülen opens up this framework and vision to all societies in the world, transforming and broadening it."

Gülen's teaching has been particularly aimed at encouraging the younger generation to combine intellectual engagement with spiritual wisdom and to give expression to this combination through a concrete commitment to the service of humanity. As a result of this approach, the movement that is associated with him has invested heavily in the development of educational institutions in Turkey itself as well as, particularly but not only, in the Central Asian regions of the former Soviet Union (see Agai, 2003; Michel, 2003).

Since retiring from formal teaching duties, Gülen has concentrated his efforts on establishing dialogue among the various ideologies, cultures, religions and ethnic groups

of Turkey and of the wider world. While Gülen and his thought are rooted in a strongly religious vision of the world, his efforts for dialogue have extended beyond traditional religious circles alone. Thus he also played a leading role in the establishment in Turkey, in 1994, of The Journalists and Writers Foundation, a forum for the promotion of tolerance and dialogue that seeks involvement from across all sectors of Turkish society, and of which Gülen is the Honorary President.

By contrast with Gülen, although he was sometimes treated as a kind of ‘guru’ figure, Arnold J. Toynbee was not a religious leader or theologian. However, in a way that is rare among intellectuals, he made a significant impact as an historian and a commentator on contemporary international affairs for the way in which he saw religions as playing a key role in civilisational birth and development. While his work is now largely marginalized, during the 1950s made a considerable impact, and this was especially the case in the USA, following the publication there of the abridgement (Somerville, 1946 and 1957) of his multi-volume magnum opus, A Study of History (Toynbee, 1934a, 1934b, 1934c, 1939a, 1939b, 1939c, 1954a, 1954b, 1954c, 1954d, with two further volumes in 1958 and 1961). On March 17th, 1947, he appeared on the cover of Time magazine and during this period he lectured at many campuses in the USA, also including a visit to Rice University, Houston, where he delivered six lectures in 1957-58.

Toynbee’s attempt at creating a global and therefore non-European-centred approach to history was one of the reasons why, during the 1960s and 1970s his work experienced a renaissance of interest beyond Europe and North America. This was particularly the case in the Far East, and especially in Japan, where the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper became the channel that spread his thinking spread to the Japanese public. By 1968 his ideas had become so influential in certain Japanese circles that a Toynbee Society was created in order to promote engagement with his thinking while Daisaku Ikeda, the President of the emerging new Buddhist movement, Sokka Gakkai, engaged him in a published dialogue (see Toynbee and Ikeda, 1976).

As has previously been noted, during many of his formative years as an historian Toynbee did not have a particularly religious view of the world, but described himself as a ‘modern pagan’. Therefore, in the first three volumes of his Study of History, religion appears more as the handmaiden of civilizational change and development, whereas from the fourth volume onwards, the religions are portrayed as giving birth to the civilizations. The Study of History takes in a very broad and panoramic sweep of human history, supported by cameos of considerable historical detail, and covering what Toynbee saw as some 21 to 23 major civilizations in the world, tracing the stages of what Toynbee argued were the “genesis”, “growth”, “time of troubles”, “universal state”, and “disintegration” through which all civilizations pass.

The erudition and historical scope of the Study was founded on the bedrock of Toynbee’s ‘Classical’ education at Winchester public school, from which he went up to Balliol, Oxford, as an undergraduate. There, following high profile success in his undergraduate studies, Toynbee became a Fellow of the College, responsible for tutoring in Ancient History. After the First World War he taught at the University of London and

worked at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in Chatham House (of which he was Director of Studies 1925-1955) while concurrently holding the position of Research Professor of International History at the University of London.

During the First World War Toynbee worked for the British Government's Political Intelligence Department while, at the conclusion of the war he was a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. During the Second World War he again worked for the Government – on this occasion in the Foreign Research and Press Service, and once again he attended the peace talks following this World War. Thus, while engaged in research and the writing of history, Toynbee also played a role within the currents of history itself as a civil servant advising Governments.

In his First World War role, Toynbee contributed to the war effort directed against Germany and its allies by writing about the sufferings of the Armenians. In doing this he undertook the research and wrote the reports that informed Lord Bryce's presentation of these issues to the British Parliament on 6th October 1915. This was published in the same year in a revised and enlarged pamphlet form under Lord Bryce's (1915) name and the title of Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation. This was followed by another (Toynbee, 1917) pamphlet entitled The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks. In 1916, Toynbee had also prepared a book of collected evidence and observations on these issues entitled, The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916. He also wrote a 1917 pamphlet, Turkey: A Past and a Future.

These nature and content of these publications may not seem to presage any sympathy with either Turks, Turkey or Islam, which are the originating contexts for Gülen and his work. But they need to be understood in the context of the First World War, and also in relation to the perspectives that, from looking out upon the world as a product of the heyday of the British Empire, it was almost inevitable that, early in his career, Toynbee would hold. His biographer, William McNeill (1989: 74), explains of this phase that "Later, Toynbee came to feel that this lopsidedness was a betrayal of historical truth. His sympathies, in fact, reversed themselves, partly because he felt he had been unjust to the Turks and needed to make atonement."

Indeed, throughout his life, Toynbee continued to write and publish quite a lot of material in relation to Turkey, the prejudices, insights and nuances of which cannot be explored in detail here due to the constraints of space, but details of which can be found in the bibliography to this essay (in Toynbee, 1923b, 1923c, 1923d, 1923e, 1923f, 1927, 1929, 1930b, 1930c, 1930d, 1930e, 1935, 1938, and 1948c; in articles upon the Ottoman Empire, see Toynbee, 1974; in articles by Toynbee and Kirkwood, 1926 and Toynbee and Carr, 1938; and in articles upon Toynbee in relation to Turkey, see Gold, 1961).

The reversal of Toynbee's sympathies referred to by McNeill took place during Toynbee's tenure of the Koraes Chair, which was a Professorship of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature at King's College, the University of London. It was because of his Classical education and learning that Toynbee was appointed to the Chair, which was sponsored by donors among the Greek diaspora in London. But he eventually resigned because of what he perceived to be political

pressure upon his academic freedom following a 1921 trip to Greece and Turkey during which he worked as a correspondent for The Manchester Guardian newspaper and reported on Greek atrocities against Turkish people.

Toynbee's experiences from this period informed his 1922 book, The Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilizations, the title of which was significant for its reversal of the traditional 'Western' formulation of issues generally referred to as the "eastern question". In fact, this reversal reflected the origins of Toynbee's attempt to create a universal history of civilizations that would not be limited by a 'Western' perspective alone. Later in his life, Toynbee recounted that it was while he was reflecting on the current events and history of this region during a train journey back from Constantinople, that he jotted down "a dozen headings which turned out to be the subjects of the principal divisions of my future book" (Toynbee, 1969: 101), in other words, The Study of History.

As *individuals* it is difficult to compare Gülen and Toynbee. One very significant difference between them is that Fethullah Gülen is still alive, whereas Arnold Toynbee died in 1975. Therefore with regard to Toynbee, it is possible to make a measured assessment of his work and his life with the benefit of the retrospect of over a quarter of century. Toynbee was undoubtedly a great public figure in the way that few other historians have become. But although there those who, during his lifetime, had a tendency to treat him as a kind of 'prophet' or even 'guru' figure, as William McNeill's (1989) biography of him makes clear, Toynbee was, like the rest of us, a flawed human being characterised by ambiguities. His first marriage ended in divorce. One of his sons died by suicide, and his relationships with his two surviving sons were not straightforward or untroubled. While adopting an increasingly religious view of life and values, he continued to exhibit what seemed a strangely disproportionate concern about financial means – which in many ways reflected the anxious middle class social and familial context into which he was born and in which he grew up.

As McNeill (1989: 284) summarised it, "Like other interesting people, Toynbee was full of contradictions." Although his Study of History made an enormous impact, it was also strongly criticised by a number of professional historians who felt it contained as much metaphysical speculation as historical fact. Most famous of these critiques was Hugh Trevor-Roper's (1957) attack in the magazine Encounter, entitled "Arnold Toynbee's Millennium", and which mocked him with the invention of "A.T" or "Anno Toynbeeana".

By contrast, since Gülen is still alive, no biography of him has yet been produced that can have the benefit of a full retrospective on his life and work, and of the diversity of views concerning him. It is undoubtedly the case that Gülen is held in great esteem by those associated with him as evidenced by the honorific title of *hocaefendi* (or 'respected teacher') accorded to him by those who follow his teachings. But he is also a figure around whom there is considerable divergence of views. While Toynbee at times became a focus for controversy he remained, at root, a part of the English cultural 'establishment'. By contrast, in his lifetime Gülen spent some months in prison when, during the period of military rule in Turkey that began in 1971, he was arrested for

organizing summer camps to disseminate Islamic ideas – something which, at that time, was viewed by the Turkish military as clandestine religious activity.

In the early 1980s a further case was prepared against Gülen by the police, but he was not in the end arrested and, by the time of the premiership of Turgut Özal, he was able to live and work relatively freely. And then, before his move to the USA, where he now lives, controversy erupted around Gülen when Turkish state television broadcast videotapes in which he was seen to be apparently preaching struggle against the secular republic and the need to overthrow and to replace it with an Islamic state.

In relation to this, some of his supporters have argued that the videotapes were created from a montage of images and sound recordings, sophisticatedly doctored in order to denigrate and attack him. But at around this time, and for what were said to be health reasons, Gülen left Turkey for the United States of America where he lives until today. In 2003, his trial in Turkey was postponed, subject to it being reactivated if he were to be indicted with a similar crime in the following five years.

The conflictual responses to Gülen and his work are reflected in the article on him that is posted on the on-line encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, as accessed on 1.9.2005 (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fethullah_Gulen#Biography). This carried a note indicating that the neutrality¹ of the article was in dispute and referring the reader to further discussion on the Wikipedia ‘talk page’. The summary of the Wikipedia article perhaps best reflects the kind of positions that many have taken up with regard to Gülen, namely that, “His supporters hail him as an important Islamic scholar with liberal ideas, while detractors accuse him for illegal activities aimed at undermining the secular republic and replacing it with an Islamic state.”

The present author is inevitably limited by not being either a specialist in Islam nor in Turkey, and also through lack of knowledge of the Turkish language in which many important and relevant documents relating to Gülen, his life and his teaching have been published. However, my experience of those associated the movement around Gülen is of a sincerity and commitment that would lead me to confirm the observation of Thomas Michel, S.J. (in Gülen, 2004a: iii) that: “Non-Muslim believers will agree that these are people with whom we can live and co-operate for the benefit of all.”

At the same time, a full evaluation of Gülen’s life and work is likely to need to await both a longer historical perspective and a more comprehensive knowledge than is available to the present author. In the meantime, what is generally accessible is to engage with the content of Gülen’s publicly accessible thinking and teaching as found in his translated (into English) published works. Of course, this does not obviate the important and challenging issue that faces *all* religious leaders and groups in terms of the consistency between their teaching and its actualisation by their followers in actual historical practice.

¹ Wikipedia has what it refers to as an ‘NPOV’ (or ‘neutral point of view’ policy, the main contours of which are outlined at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view. It is also guided by a ‘no-original-research’ and ‘verifiability’ policy.

But, while this paper has sought to contextualise the individual lives and work of Gülen and of Toynbee within their particular social and historical circumstances, its aim is not to evaluate the practice of Gülen or the movement associated with him, or to compare the subjective personalities of Gülen and Toynbee, but rather to bring key aspects of their thinking and perspectives into mutual interaction. Therefore it is the intention of this paper that this mediated conversation between the published thought of these major figures from the ‘East’ and ‘West’ might assist in the illumination of each other’s work, as well as in making it more widely known beyond their original ‘civilizational constituencies’.

Basic Frameworks of Thought: Gülen and Toynbee

On the level of ideas, in their mature thought both Gülen and Toynbee have in common that they have become capable of thinking and imagining on a scale far wider than many in the cultural and religious traditions in which they were brought up. In so doing, both Toynbee and Gülen have challenged some of the general expectations of their inherited civilizational contexts. By attempting a universal history, Toynbee was already challenging the dominant Western civilization’s view of itself as the apex of history. Gülen, also, has stood out against the dichotomous and restricted options seemingly available to Muslims in the contemporary ‘westernised’ and globalised world.

While Toynbee’s early involvement in matters relating to Turkey and Islam reflected much of the outlook of his contemporaries, by the early 1920s he was developing a more independent view in which he argued for the importance of recognizing the emerging currents of Islamic self-determination. This was reflected in the fact that Volume I of the third of his annual Chatham House Survey of International Affairs was on the subject of The Islamic World Since the Peace Settlement (Toynbee, 1925). Setting this growing awareness of Islamic dynamics within the framework of his emergent Study of History enabled Toynbee quite presciently to come to a more mature evaluative assessment of the possible futures of Islam and its relationship with the rest of the world (to which he returned again in some later publications in Toynbee, 1923a, 1930a; and, see Weil, 1951, as well as in the text of the Study of History itself).

This new evaluation by Toynbee continued to develop throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and was embodied in Toynbee’s essay on “Islam, the West and the Future”, published in his book Civilization on Trial (Toynbee, 1948a: 184-212). In considering the way in which, as he put it, “Islam and our Western society have acted and reacted upon one another several times in succession, in different situations and in alternating roles” (Toynbee, 1948a: 184) he argued that, with regard to Islam in the post-War context, there are “two alternative ways open to it of responding to the challenge” (Toynbee, 1948a: 187) of an emerging global and ‘westernizing’ world. These Toynbee characterised by typologies of response to challenge that were derived from Jewish history in the Graeco-Roman era, and which he called the responses of either the ‘Zealot’ or the ‘Herodian’.

In what follows, it is argued that the way in which Toynbee describes these two possible responses remains of illuminative value today, with regard to the movement around

Gülen, the situation Islam in Turkey and, indeed, to the general situation of Islam in the contemporary world. Of the ‘Zealot’ Toynbee (1948a: 188) says that he is one who “... takes refuge from the unknown in the familiar”. The ‘Herodian’ he describes as one who “...acts on the principle that the most effective way to guard against the danger of the unknown is to master its secret” (Toynbee, 1948a: 193).

As compared to ‘Zealotry’, Toynbee sees ‘Herodianism’ as “an incomparably more effective form of response...to the inexorable ‘Western question’ that confronts the whole contemporary world” (Toynbee, 1948a: 195), but he also notes that “it does not really offer a solution”. This is because Toynbee saw ‘Herodianism’ as involving a dangerous balancing act. Toynbee then described this balancing act as, “...a form of swapping horses while crossing a stream, and the rider who fails to find his seat in the new saddle is swept off by the current to a death as certain as that which awaits the ‘Zealot’ when, with spear and shield, he charges a machine gun.” (Toynbee, 1948a: 195)

Toynbee then identified Republican Turkey as the epitome of the ‘Herodian’ response, explaining it thus: “Here, in Turkey, is a revolution which, instead of confining itself to a single plane, like our successive economic and political and aesthetic and religious revolutions in the West, has taken place on all these planes simultaneously and has thereby convulsed the whole life of the Turkish people from the heights to the depths of social experience and activity” (Toynbee, 1948a: 196). But at the same time, he pointed out that the two “inherent weaknesses” of ‘Herodianism’ are that it is “mimetic and not creative” (Toynbee, 1948a: 198) and also that even success in mimesis “can bring salvation – even mere salvation in this world – only to a small minority of any community which takes the ‘Herodian’ path.” (Toynbee, 1948a: 199).

Toynbee summarised the Catch-22 situation that arises from the pressure to choose between these dichotomous alternatives, in the following way: “The rare ‘Zealot’ who escapes extermination becomes the fossil of a civilization which is extinct as a living force; the rather less infrequent ‘Herodian’ who escapes submergence becomes a mimic of the living civilization to which he assimilates himself. Neither the one nor the other is in any position to make any creative contribution to this living civilization’s further development.” (Toynbee, 1948a: 199). At the same time, Toynbee furthermore argued that both ‘Herodian’ and ‘Zealot’ responses are *minority* responses and commented that: “The destiny of the majority is neither to be exterminated nor to be fossilized nor to be assimilated, but to be submerged by being enrolled in the vast, cosmopolitan, ubiquitous proletariat which is one of the most portentous by-products of the ‘Westernization’ of the world.” (Toynbee, 1948a: 201)

With the vantage of a hindsight that Toynbee did not have before he died in the 1970s, we can see that, in Turkey, what Toynbee called the ‘Herodian’ stance has been continued by secularists, while the ‘Zealot’ reaction of an ‘Islamist’ political ideology has also emerged. And there is a tendency for many people in both ‘Western’ and Muslim societies to want to limit the available choices between these two options, the nature of which is expressed in a vivid phrase from Daniel Lerner’s influential 1958 study of the transformation of Turkish peasant life, The Passing of Traditional Society, in which he spoke of alternatives of “Mecca or mechanization” (Lerner, 1958: 405).

The question of how to navigate through the insistence on these alternatives that can often found among secularists, religious traditionalists and new Islamists alike is a central part of the challenge facing Gülen and the movement associated with him, and especially so in his homeland of Turkey. It is arguable, though, that Gülen's teaching represents an attempt to find another, alternative, path that is reflected in the title of Ahmet Kuru's (2003: 115-130) essay on "Fethullah Gülen's Search for a Middle Way Between Modernity and Muslim Tradition". Of course, steering a 'middle' or 'third' way is a project that is fraught with difficulty. In politics, 'third ways' have often been viewed with a certain scepticism on the basis that, in the end, they have turned out not to have been 'third ways' after all, but rather variants on one or other dominant ideology. There remains a possibility that this may become the fate of the movement initiated by Gülen.

At this point in time the outcome cannot definitively be known. However, what is significant and potentially creative with regard to Gülen and his teaching is that the 'middle way' that he advocates is not a road of mere 'compromise' but is one that is rooted in a particular understanding and application of traditional Islam and in which Islam is itself identified in terms of a 'middle way'. As Ahmet Kuru (2003: 130) argues: "Gülen does not try to create an eclectic or hybrid synthesis of modernity and Islam or to accommodate the hegemony of modernity by changing Islamic principles. What he does is reveal a dynamic interpretation of Islam that is both compatible with and critical of modernity and Muslim tradition."

Indeed, Gülen interprets the very important Islamic concept of 'the straight path' as precisely the 'middle way' between excesses and deficiencies. Therefore, in his book, Prophet Muhammad: The Infinite Light, Gülen (1995: 200-201) explains that: "Islam, being 'the middle way' of absolute balance – balance between materialism and spiritualism, between rationalism and mysticism, between worldliness and excessive asceticism, between this world and the next – and inclusive of the ways of all the previous prophets, makes a choice according to the situation." Whether, during the process of translating these ideals into the kind of choices that need to be made in the midst of the ambiguities of the political and economic currents of history it will be possible to maintain such balance in relation to gravitational pull of the typologically 'Zealot' or 'Herodian' responses is a real question. And the outcome of this question may be of considerable importance for the future of Islam, and potentially for the geopolitical role of Turkey as a bridge between historic civilizational zones.

With regard to Turkey's relations with the 'West', while adopting a tone of 'western' superiority as a rhetorical device in order to make the point, Toynbee noted that: "while we did not like the outrageous old-fashioned Turkish 'Zealot' " and that "we set ourselves to humble his pride by making his particularity odious", then having "...pierced his psychological armour and goaded him into that 'Herodian' revolution" in which he "searched out every means of making himself indistinguishable from the nations around him", the ironic result is that the 'West' is "embarrassed and even inclined to be indignant" (Toynbee, 1948a: 198)!

And so, summarising the invidious situation into which a society such as Turkey can be forced, Toynbee explained that: “The victim of our censure might retort that, whatever he does, he cannot do right in our eyes, and he might quote against us, from our own Scriptures, ‘We have piped unto you and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you and ye have not wept.’ ” (Toynbee, 1948a: 198). Given the nature of the objections that emerged in the recent decision to initiate a timetable for Turkey’s accession to the European Union, these observations made by Toynbee as long ago as 1948 would still appear to be pertinent.

Looking beyond Turkey to the broader position of Muslims in general, Toynbee also identified the possibility of a more mixed position emerging alongside the dichotomous alternatives of the ‘Zealot’ or the ‘Herodian’ response. At the same time, in connection with this he warned that “A panmixia may end in a synthesis, but it may equally well end in an explosion; and, in that disaster, Islam might have a quite different part to play as the active ingredient in some violent reaction of the cosmopolitan underworld against its Western masters.” (Toynbee, 1948a: 209). Drawing attention to the Prophet’s original liberation of Syria and Egypt from Hellenic domination, and to Islam’s defence against the Crusaders and the Mongols, Toynbee went on to note that that, “On two historic occasions in the past, Islam has been the sign in which an Oriental society has risen up victoriously against an Occidental intruder.” (Toynbee, 1948: 212)

Referring to historical precedents in which unexpected currents and movements (as in the case of Christianity) burst out from the underside of history, Toynbee pointed out the possibility that such precedents may “...portend that Islam, in entering into the proletarian underworld of our latter-day Western civilization, may eventually compete with India and the Far East and Russia for the prize of influencing the future in ways that may pass our understanding” (Toynbee, 1948a: 203). And, in summing up these futurological speculations, Toynbee warned that a world which cries out for anti-Western leadership may “have incalculable psychological effects in evoking the militant spirit of Islam...because it might awaken echoes of an heroic age” (Toynbee, 1948a: 212).

The foresight of this speculation, written over half a century ago, can today be better appreciated given the role the positioning around Islam that has taken place in contemporary regional and global conflicts. Thus, Fethullah Gülen has observed that: “Islamic societies entered the twentieth century as a world of the oppressed, the wronged, and the colonized; the first half of the century was occupied with wars of liberation and independence, wars that carried over from the nineteenth century. In all these wars, Islam assumed the role of an important factor uniting people and spurring them to action. As these wars were waged against what were seen as invaders, Islam, national independence and liberation came to mean the same thing” (Gülen, 2004a: 239).

In describing this historical development, Gülen both relates the factuality of what has occurred in the interaction between Islam and the broad currents of global politics, but he also identifies the roots of a current concern in which, for many, Islam has become a political ideology bringing with it what, he argues, are damaging consequences for

Islam, Muslims and the world. As Gülen explains his position: “When those who have adopted Islam as a political ideology, rather than a religion in its true sense and function, review their self-proclaimed Islamic activities and attitudes, especially their political ones, they will discover that the driving force is usually personal or national anger, hostility, and similar motives. If this is the case, we must accept Islam and adopt an Islamic attitude as the fundamental starting point for action, rather than the existing oppressive situation” since without such a re-evaluation, it remains the case that “The present, distorted image of Islam that has resulted from its misuse, by both Muslims and non-Muslims for their own goals, scares both Muslims and non-Muslims” (in Ünal and Williams, 2000: 248).

Indeed, in the adoption of terrorist activities and justification of them, such an ideologised version of Islam has still further both distorted Islam and its image in the wider world. With regard to such activities Gülen has a very clearly articulated position. Thus, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, in the Washington Post newspaper of 21.9.2001 Gülen stated clearly that:

“We condemn in the strongest of terms the latest terrorist attack on the United States of America, and feel the pain of the American people at the bottom of our hearts.

Islam abhors acts of terror. A religion that professes “He who unjustly kills one man kills the whole of humanity,” cannot condone senseless killing of thousands.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and their loved-ones.”

Indeed, in his “Message Concerning the September 11th Terrorist Attacks” Gülen went further to state clearly that, “Islam does not approve of terrorism in any form. Terrorism cannot be used to achieve any Islamic goal. No terrorist can be a Muslim, and no real Muslim can be a terrorist.” (in Gülen, 2004a: 261-262). Furthermore, in his piece entitled “Real Muslims Cannot be Terrorists”, Gülen explains, “The reasons why certain Muslim people or institutions that misunderstand Islam are becoming involved in a terrorist attacks throughout the world should not be sought in Islam, but within the people themselves, in their misinterpretations and in other factors. Just as Islam is not a religion of terrorism, any Muslim who correctly understands Islam cannot be or become a terrorist.” (in Gülen, 2004a: 179).

Toynbee did not live to see this latest development of global history and we therefore do not know what his specific approach to this would have been. However, his legacy is one that encourages us to try to trace meaning in the patterns of history and to recognise that the past hundred or so years of Western dominance are, in historical perspective, only a very small span in the course of the rise and fall of civilizations. Thus he speculated upon the future of this civilization in a way that questioned its unexamined self-assurance and, when he did so, he found that a once adoring Western (and, especially, American) public became increasingly at variance with him. Therefore, although Toynbee achieved a kind of ‘celebrity’ status in the USA, this very soon faded

in the wake of the questions that he increasingly posed to the USA's image of itself and his insistence on the unlikelihood of American victory in Vietnam.

Like Toynbee, Gülen (2004a: 247) has a realistic evaluation of the historical forces at work in the world that is one that takes account of *Realpolitik* and, like Toynbee, Gülen sets this within a religious vision of historical development that challenges the inclination of all current holders of power not to see their own tendency to hubris and their historical relativity in the passage of time. Thus, with regard to the dominant powers of the world Gülen explains that "...there has always been a power that has kept the balance in the world and there always will be. This power was once Rome; then for a time it was Islam, first with the Arabs and then through the Muslim Turks, that assumed this function. Starting with the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Saxon world has taken hold of this position of balancing the world; first it was the British Empire that did this, followed by, after World War II, America. God states in the Holy Qur'an that He gives property to whomever he wishes, and also that He takes it away from whomever he wishes...". (Gülen, 2004a: 247)

However, while Gülen's vision of history is set within a clear theological perspective that the framework of things is ultimately determined by the will of God, he also affirms that, within this, humanity's actions and choices can bring about varied effects. Therefore, when considering the role of global power held by the USA in the contemporary world Gülen reflects that, "Today, the USA engages the dominant position in the political balance of the world. However, its dominance depends on whether it continues to act on the basis of justice and human rights" and that "no system can live long if it is supported solely by force. Force that does not depend on rights and justice will inescapably diverge toward oppression and thus prepare its own end." (in Gülen, 2004a: 248)

Informed by such a perspective, while clearly condemning the 9/11 attacks, it is significant that Gülen also warned about the kind of response that the USA might make. Expressing it in words, the force and resonance of which are only underlined by what has occurred over the past four years, Gülen said "Before America's leaders and people respond to this heinous assault out of their justified anger and pain, please let me express that they must understand why such a terrible event occurred and let us look to how similar tragedies can be avoided in the future. They must also be aware of the fact that injuring innocent masses in order to punish a few guilty people is to no one's benefit; rather, such actions will only strengthen the terrorists by feeding any existing resentment and by giving birth to more terrorists and more violence." (in Gülen, 2004a: 262).

Sadly, the prescience of Gülen's warning can be seen all too clearly in the continuing instability of Afghanistan; in the quagmire of death and destruction that Iraq has become; in the tangled metal and bloody aftermath of the train bomb in Madrid in March 2004; and most recently of all in London Transport bombings of July 2005, and the second Bali bombing. In a 21st century world, the opening years of which have been characterised by events of this kind, there is a need for resources that can be offered through the thinking of those who can understand and interpret the currents of history. But building on such understanding and interpretation, both Toynbee and Gülen have, in

their work, been committed to the importance of affirming the possibility of, and need for, inter-civilisational and inter-religious dialogue.

Toynbee, Gülen, History and Dialogue

Arnold Toynbee came from a British and European background but was one of the earliest people in the modern ‘West’ to see history in a truly global rather than a Western perspective alone. Asked in a 1965 NBC programme about how he would like to be remembered, Toynbee said, “As someone who has tried to see it whole, and....not just in western terms” (in McNeill, 1989: 284).

At the peak of the impact of his work, Toynbee advocated a view of history that diverged from predominant secular histories in its evaluation of the dynamic of religion as the main key for understanding civilizational change, as outlined in a compact way in his book An Historian’s Approach to Religion (Toynbee, 1956). In this central feature of his work, Toynbee’s mature perspective coincides with that of Gülen who has argued that: “Regardless of changes, advancements in science and technology, and new ways of thinking, the feeling of attachment to a religion has always been the primary factor in forming humanity’s scientific and intellectual life, developing human virtues, and establishing new civilizations. With its charm and power, religion is still and will continue to be the most influential element and power in people’s lives. This reality will continue to exist. The existence of two great civilizations in history, one based mainly on Islam and the other owing a good deal to Christianity, proves this argument.” (in Gülen, 2000: 43)

Because of what Toynbee called the “annihilation of distance” (Toynbee, 1958: 87) brought about by technology and the modern means of transportation he argued that, “all local problems” have been converted into “world-wide problems.” In concert with Toynbee’s early insight into this changed situation, Gülen has also observed that, “Modern means of communication and transportation have transformed the world into a large, global village. So, those who expect that any radical changes in a country will be determined by that country alone and remain limited to it, are unaware of current realities. This time is a period of interactive relations. Nations and people are more in need of and dependent on each other, which causes closeness in mutual relations.” (Gülen, 2004a: 230).

One of the consequences of the creation of this ‘global village’ is the need to recognise that inter-religious dialogue is not a luxury; and that it has become not only desirable but also a necessity. An increasing number of Gülen’s publications address the need for such dialogue, including the compilation of speeches and articles by Gülen and about him compiled by Alu Ünal and Alphonse Williams (2000) and entitled, Advocate of Dialogue, while dialogue is the main burden of Gülen’s most recent published works in Love and Essence of Being Human (2004b) and in Towards a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance (2004a).

In a compact and accessible way, the main contours of Gülen’s thinking on dialogue can be found in his article on “The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective”

(in Ünal and Williams, 2000: 241-256) and in his piece on “At the Threshold of a New Millennium” (in Ünal and Williams, 2000: 225-232), the texts of both of which, it should be noted, were written before the global religious and political shock of 9/11 and its aftermath, thus underlining that Gülen’s advocacy of dialogue is not merely reactive and pragmatic, but is also rooted in his vision of Islam and the contemporary world.

Thus in his Millennium reflections Gülen set out his conviction about the importance of dialogue in the following way: “I believe and hope that the world of the new millennium will be a happier, more just and more compassionate place, contrary to the fears of some people. Islam, Christianity and Judaism all come from the same root, have almost the same essentials and are nourished from the same source. Although they have lived as rival religions for centuries, the common points between them and their shared responsibility to build a happy world for all of the creatures of God, make interfaith dialogue among them necessary. This dialogue has now expanded to include the religions of Asia and other areas. The results have been positive. As mentioned above, this dialogue will develop as a necessary process, and the followers of all religion will find ways to become closer and assist each other.” (Gülen, 2004a: 231)

Conclusions

There are other aspects of the thinking of Gülen and of Toynbee that could, with benefit to our overall theme, be comparatively explored. These include, for example, Toynbee’s differentiation between “essence” and “accretion” in religion in relation to Gülen’s distinction between “primary” and “secondary” issues; as well as the whole question of the relationship between religion, technology, science and the secular. However, space precludes this. But in a world in which both Christians and Muslims, as well as others, can become prey to an ethos of fear in which they either retreat into the security of the familiar and the known, or else strike out against the ‘other’ in an attempt to preserve values and ways of life that are perceived to be under fundamental threat, the thinking of Toynbee and Gülen offer important intellectual and spiritual resources.

Both Toynbee and Gülen affirm there is a fundamental continuity in the issues faced by human beings in relation to their behaviour with one another and their place in the universe. At the same time, the specific nature of the challenges of diversity and plurality – challenges which have previously been present in individual historical societies but which, in the 21st century, have been elevated onto a global stage. Thus, as early as the middle of the twentieth century, in his An Historian’s Approach to Religion Toynbee was already arguing that: “The adherents of each religion...seem likely to come gradually to be distributed all over the *Oikoumenê*, but it may also be expected that, in the process, they will come to be intermingled everywhere with adherents of all other faiths.... As a result, the appearance of the religious map of the *Oikoumenê* may be expected to change from a pattern of a patchwork quilt to the texture of a piece of shot silk.” (1956: 139).

To be able to live creatively and with integrity in a world such as this without becoming trapped into the response of either ‘Herodian’ compromise or ‘Zealot’ reaction is challenging. But as addressed to Christians – though arguably with potential

applicability also to others, in his book Christianity Among the Religions of the World, Toynbee maintained that: “I believe that Christians today can face the future with confidence if they face it with charity and humility. The crucial point I want to make is that we can have conviction without fanaticism, we can have belief and action without arrogance or self-centredness or pride.” (Toynbee, 1958: 111). As addressed to Muslims – but likewise arguably also with potential applicability to others, Gülen has explained that: “Tolerance does not mean being influenced by others or joining them; it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them” (Gülen, 2004a: 42).

Though coming from different civilisational backgrounds and having different personal biographies, in their thinking both Toynbee and Gülen stand against ways of thinking and acting that promote what can all too easily become the illusion that the uncomfortable plurality of the contemporary world can be abolished. Against such illusions Gülen warns that: “...different beliefs, races, customs and traditions will continue to cohabit in this village. Each individual is like a unique realm unto themselves; therefore the desire for all humanity to be similar to one another is nothing more than wishing for the impossible. For this reason, the peace of this (global) village lies in respecting all these differences, considering these differences to be part of our nature and in ensuring that people appreciate these differences. Otherwise, it is unavoidable that the world will devour itself in a web of conflicts, disputes, fights, and the bloodiest of wars, thus preparing the way for its own end.” (2004a: 249-250).

In contrast to the threat of such an outcome, the thought of both Toynbee and of Gülen offer intellectual and spiritual resources that enable us better to understand the one world in which we all live, as well as to engage with the challenges that living in this world brings. Such resources are needed now, more than ever, for understanding the nature and dynamics of the world in which we live, and for enabling us to be better equipped to resist the kind of disastrous outcomes which some argue are inevitable; which many others fear; and which all of us have a responsibility and a possibility to do something about.

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