

〈指定研究〉

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Fethullah Gulen:
Humanity and Service, Education and Universal Values

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INTRODUCTION

In the way of the world, the strong do what they will, the weak take what they have to. International relations are operated on competition and conflict but also on cooperation. More often than not, people, communities and states neglect the universal values of compassion, love and fellow-feeling. As Gulen (2000) summarized:

Human life at the level of the individual and of humanity as a whole is merely the summation of internal, personal struggles and their external manifestations. These tides make the personal world of the individual, society and history an arena of battle, struggle, war, oppression and tyranny. Human beings themselves suffer the consequences.

This is the core of humanity's dilemma, always in quest for peace, continuously resorting to war. The problem is less about what man does to man; it is more about how humanity harms itself by losing humility. As Zukav (1990) put it, humble spirits do not compete for external power. To compete, to strive, is not actually negative; it is tantamount to "going in quest of Allah's bounty (Qur'an 62, v. 10). You strive for external power when you strive to assert your superiority over another. You only delude yourself.

The bane of our life today is the loss of humility; the preoccupation to control and manipulate others. This is histrionic as well as historical. Man manipulates and controls man; even animals and the environment are victims of his arrogance. This humanity's self-destruction is the by-product of humanity's march to civilization; the precarious path that humanity has embarked upon especially since the last two centuries that concern people such as Shaykh Gulen.

Fethullah Gulen was born in Erzurum (Eastern Turkey) in 1938. He trained in Islamic Sciences and

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studied the principles and theories of modern Social and Physical Sciences. He got the Preacher's Licence in 1958 and was posted to Izmir. He travelled wide in Anatolia, giving lectures in mosques, town meetings and corner coffee houses. Through sermons and speeches, he addressed social issues, urging the youth to be intellectually enlightened, spiritually wise and be caring human activists. He emphasised social justice as the sine qua non of Education, Science and the Economy. He became readily accepted and respected by the Academic Community. Gulen retired from formal teaching in 1981 as a well known and highly respected figure in Turkey (Tughra Books, 2012). He continued as a preacher Emeritus from 1988 to 1991 in the traditional centres and conferences in Turkey and Western Europe. He reputedly envisioned a 21st Century of a spiritual dynamic revitalizing long-dormant moral values ushering in an age of tolerance, understanding and international cooperation, creating a single civilization through dialogue and shared values.

Gulen was convinced that humanity can be saved from itself through the proper education of the younger generation to inculcate in them the universal values of compassion and love, service and respect, tolerance and forgiveness through dialogue (Gulen, 2000). He spearheaded organizations dedicated to communal welfare, used mass media to inform the public and mobilized like minded people to raise funds to establish peculiar schools in Turkey and around the world. Various political developments in Turkey 'curbed' Gulen's activism until the threats of treason charges that targeted prominent figures including Gulen; he was forced to go on exile in March 1999 in Pennsylvania, USA. On his acquittal of all charges in 2008, he chose to stay back in his new home. From Pennsylvania, Gulen remained the guiding light of the Hizmet Organization through his sermons and writings even as he fostered dialogue internationally. He got many international awards including in 2013, the *Time Magazine's* 100 most influential people in the world leaders' list. On October 20, 2024, he passed on and was laid to rest in Saylorsburg, PA on 24 October, 2024 (Fountain, Special Edition, Nov-Dec, 2024).

Through his many books, speeches, preaching and dialogues, Gulen left great intellectual legacy and profound social impact in the great movement he inspired, continues to strive to "change the world" through a unique educational approach woven around morality and not ritual to promote universal values capable of creating the envisioned better humanity. According to Fountain Magazine (Nov-Dec, 2024), at his passing, Gulen's message had reached 170 countries through schools and relief initiatives. He had inspired and continues to inspire people of varied national and religious affiliations.

This paper examines Gulen's ideas of how to curb arrant humanity, interrogates his core assumptions and appraises with understanding his Education Model.

SERVE HUMANITY, EDUCATE FOR VALUES: GULEN'S APPROACH

Gulen was a moralist through and through. Underpinning his notion of education is the philosophy that sees Education as the purpose of life; a perfecting process through which man earns spiritually, intellectually and physically, to attain "the rank of appointed perfection meant for man" (Gulen, 2000). According to Ibn Miskawayhi (quoted in Gulen, 2000, p.68), reason and anger and lust respectively are crucial to man's ability to weigh options and make decisions; both central to man's survival and security. As Gulen put it, to be able to refine our instincts and emotions and drive them to virtue lies through sound, purposeful and balanced education that has sharpened both the intellect and the spirit. This is the core of Gulen's idea of education; to help the individual to be drawn to virtue, the centre of

ethos — the moral compass — and away from vice, to be able to attain perfection, “maintaining a condition of balance and moderation between the two extremes relating to every virtue” (p.69). As far as he is concerned, the state, the society can only be improved by improving the young generation.

Akin to Ibn Khaldun’s “Cyclical Phenomenon” (Oluwatoki, 2001) concerning dynasties and empires, Gulen interestingly links the vices in the present generation and incompetence of some administrators with the atmosphere created by the ruling elite of 25 years ago. To him, “those who are charged with educating today’s young people will be responsible for the vices and virtues that will appear in another 25 years” (p.72). The profundity of Gulen’s idea will be appreciated if one considers Nigeria’s education system from 1950 to 2025 (three cycles of youthful ages). In terms of quality and adequacy of infrastructure, quality and remuneration of teachers and content of education given, the quality of education has progressively deteriorated. There is no gainsaying it that this maladministration of education at all levels has had ample deleterious effect on the Nigerian society and its values in the last seventy-five years. By a flight of imagination, one can contemplate what the situation would be with the Nigerian education system by the year 3000. It will be interesting to know how this Gulen idea on 25 years cycles of virtues and vices play out due to the education and miseducation of the youth.

The thought of this consequence on a global scale is horrendous where quality education is denied the youth. As Gulen succinctly put it, “those who wish to predict a nation’s future can do so correctly by taking a full account of the education and upbringing given to its young people. “Knowledge gained in young age is like an inscription on stone” (Arab Proverb). Gulen was indeed a great educationist. One of his grandest achievements is the number of schools that have been opened in Turkey and around the world by entrepreneurs inspired by him and his vision on education of the young.

It cannot be convincingly said that people’s behavioural patterns are formed by the input of ideas of morality and their ready recall from memory when the occasion demands their application. In other words, we do not recall behavioural patterns through the same process (cognition) by which knowledge and understanding is processed in the mind. Neurologists have proved that memory loss (in the brain-damaged patient) is “evidence of a restructuring of the patient’s relation to his or her environment”. It is not the loss of an ‘image’ or a “memory trace” in the brain (Rosenfield, 1992, p.22). If behaviour is “the way that somebody behaves especially towards others”, if behaviour can be equated with “functioning in a particular situation” (Hornby, 2010, p.121), behaviour will have to do with recall (remembering) in a way different with recalling a number, equation formula or a story. Behaviour, at least in human beings, combines recall with judgement. As Rosenfield put it:

How we acquire a memory, the process of memory, and how our brains make the memories available for conscious or unconscious acts are thoughts — these are integral parts of memory itself (p.22).

In view of the above, there will be need for research on the correctness of the non-teaching of religion in the Gulen-inspired schools in some parts of the world. As Bayramoglu observed:

These schools don’t give religious education or encompass educational activities with a religious environment, as is assumed. They have been established on the model of Anadolu high schools,

with superior technical equipment and laboratory Religious subjects are not even taught ... the toilets were purposefully not kept sparkling clean to avoid the idea that praying might follow cleanliness (Gulen, 2000, pp.88-89).

It is doubtful if morality can be taught independent of religion. This is definitely a secular education. While the non-governmental organizations may be showing sensitivity to the religious sensibilities of the host communities/states, what becomes of the Muslim and Christian children brought up in this anaesthetized religious environment? Is this actually what Shaykh Gulen advocated? One wonders whether Muslim children (especially) given this type of education are not being de-cultured Islamically and whether or not they would grow up with the very religion-science conflict, which Gulen (2000, p.78) abhorred.

According to Bediuzzaman (quoted in Gulen (p.84), "...there is an understanding of education that sees the illumination of the mind in *science* and *knowledge*, and *the light of the heart* in *faith* and *virtue*. Gulen sees proper education as the one that rescues science from materialism; that removes its destructive aspect and reinforces its beneficial part; liberate who equate religion with being cut-off from scientific truth (p.84). This is the essence of Gulen's message and his life-long devotion to proper education. It is apposite to say that all concerned should revisit this issue in furtherance of sustaining the great legacies of Fethullah Gulen.

ISLAM AND CHRISTENDOM: A CASE FOR COLLECTIVE MEMORY

To begin with, it must be admitted that to consider the religion of others is not a piece of cake. This is because one is essentially coming with predetermined stance, being of a different cast of minds, which perhaps hinders one to see the 'truth' that others see in their own religions. This obstacle is surmountable if one steadfastly approaches it from the individual perspective. Things become complicated when one considers religion as a group thing, especially when power and politics are brought into the equation. Smith (1965) has however helped us with a moral compass, so to speak, to make it easy by taking those other religions seriously:

One, will need to see their adherents as men and women confronted with problems like ourselves. Second, we must rid our minds of all preconceptions that will dull their sensitivity or alertness to fresh insights.

Smith admonishes us to lay aside our preformed ideas about the religions, see each as the struggles of the adherents to find meaning to their lives, try without prejudice to see what they saw. As he put it, "...if we do these things, the veil that separates us from them, while not removed, can be reduced to gauze".

In his robust argument for the necessity of inter-faith dialogue, Gulen (2000, p.34) showed his concern about the limited influence of religion in contemporary social life. He was convinced that the reconciliation of the material and spiritual realms will yield social harmony and peace with nature and between individuals. According to him, the West is the base of unbelief and Christianity has been the religion most influenced by unbelief. To him, dialogue between Muslims and Christians appears

inevitable.

Gulen somehow presented discordant views. He was preoccupied with the Abrahamic faiths especially Islam and Christianity; the other world religions are tangential to his concerns. Meanwhile, other religions, or at least, the world religions — Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and for obvious reasons, African Traditional Religion — should have our attention if we truly desire universal peace and understanding. At least, one thing is certain, if we consider every religion with open mind, we will learn “to see and feel the world and God as others have seen them” (Smith, 1965, p.351).

Islam is uncompromising on associating partner(s) with Allah and attributing to Him having progeny (Qur’an 4, vs. 48, 116). Christianity opposes this central doctrine of Islam as the antithesis of this doctrine is central to its theology. Christianity was in denial of Islam’s authenticity for centuries. What would dialogue achieve on these fundamentally diametrically opposed positions on godhead between them even if today, so to speak, Christianity has come to accept the genuineness of the Message of Islam? There must be a well-thought out modality of this dialogue. Power determines things and situations and not necessarily truth (and which truth, anyway)? Science and technology rule the world and those who possess them dictate affairs, not as heads of religion/faith, but as heads of state and corporation, who are almost always secularists.

Dialogue is good but it is more feasible among the faithful. At the personal level, religion ‘rules’ the lives of ordinary people. At the state and corporate levels, people are torn between adhering to the dictate of states law and corporate policies and science and material and religious precepts. It is often like maintaining balance in a whirlwind. Gulen (2000, p.41) declared:

...The West has scientific, technological, economic and military supremacy ...Islam has retained the freshness of its beliefs, spiritual essence, good works and morality. ...it has the potential to blow spirit and life into Muslims, numbed for centuries as well as into many other peoples doomed in the swamp of materialism.

First, there is no basis for comparing a people to a religion. The West is not Christianity. In any case, the brand of Christianity, which was brought to many parts of the world was European — a blend of “Pre-Christian” European (Roman and Anglo-Saxon) beliefs spiced with the teachings and practices of Christ and his early disciples (Boer, 1976, chapter 11). Second, this European Christianity oversaw the trans-Atlantic slave trade and was later used with justification from Social Darwinism to effect colonization of many parts of the world under 19th century European Imperialism (Smith, Muzzey and Lloyd, 1952; Perry, Peden and Von Laue, 1995). Third, there is no gainsaying it that the real triumph of Western Civilization, which in any case is Judeo-Christian is that Europe has created the world in its own image. Are many Muslims around the world not in the quagmire of materialism with the rest of the world? Did Gulen have this brand of Christianity in mind, did he have the morass in which even Muslims are in in focus when talking about inter-faith dialogue?

Every religion bears the imprint of the environment where it originated and ultimately where it is practiced. As it is with Christianity, so it is with Islam as well as other religions. From the historical perspective therefore, the concern is not about religious doctrines and rituals but about the devotees; the people who practice religion, the institutions they build around their faith and their ideas of their group identity that inform their behaviour towards others.

History has shown us many states created on the claim of divine guidance. From the Greek city-states to the Papacy and to the Caliphate and the Sultanate, religion has played decisive roles in the formation and expansion of states. Many aspects of relations among states have been premised on faith either in war or peace. This was particularly the case between the World of Islam and Christendom. Islam and Christianity have been the causes of much tension in history especially between the Papacy and the Caliphate (Oluwatoki, Unpublished Manuscript).

As Armstrong (2014, p.10) put it, "War", the ultimate form of violence, "is a means of surrender to the reptilian ruthlessness, one of the strongest of human drives, without being troubled by the self-critical nudges of the neocortex". It is not surprising that when Man domesticated plants and exiting his hitherto hunter-gathering life; expressed in religious term, the earth that yielded him the means of survival became the victim. In Armstrong's words, "Farming implements were depicted as weapons that wounded the earth, so farming plots became fields of blood". How ironic that a spiritual allegorical conception became a reality millennial after; the earth, through religion continuously goes through bloodbath. It is a fulfilment of the apprehension that the Angels expressed of Men corrupting the earth and spilling blood when God announced His intention to create Man (Qur'an, 2, v. 30). Scapegoating is the origin of faith, as Armstrong (2014, p.7) explains; like the ancient Jews "ritually placed people's misdeed onto the head of the goat, which they drove into the desert, modern man makes adherents of other religions the scapegoat".

Onward from the 12th century, culminating in mid-15th Century with the Ottoman Empire's capture of Constantinople (1453), Muslims menaced Christian lands and this led to the Jihad and the Crusades, ostensible religious wars with great secular/economic undercurrent on both sides (Smith, Mussey and Lloyd, 1952; Hitti, 1970). The West (Europeans) learnt a lot from their encounter with the East (Muslims) through the crusades but they never forgot the superiority of the civilization they encountered. Renaissance followed Christian Europe's encounter with the Islamic East. To the Europeans of this period, the Renaissance "liberated the human mind" from the encumbrance of the Church 'preventing' human progress. Renaissance period marked a break with the medieval culture of dominance of religion (Perry, Peden and Von Laue, 1995). This was the beginning of the modern age, followed by the scientific revolution, followed by the Enlightenment, the philosophical outlook of which "rejected beliefs and traditions that seemed to conflict with reason" (Perry, Peden and Von Laue, 1995, p.55). The free use of the intellect was the hallmark of the Enlightenment. Discoveries after discoveries characterized this important period of European history (see Mee, Jr., Boorstin, Olmert and Merson in Section 10: "Renaissance, Reformation and Printing" in Beckwith and Biggs (Eds. (2004).

There is no gainsaying it that Muslims dominated the scientific and technological firmament of the medieval period (Husaini, 2002) and the West knows this, whether acknowledged or not (Hill, 2004). As Sardar (2004) explains, the aftermath of the Mongol invasion and its impact on Muslim civilization agitated the pious scholars concerning the misuse of *ijtihad* — the rigor and discipline that facilitates knowledge creation — in religious practices; application of reason was curtailed with the imposition of *taqlid* consequent upon the Ash'arites' (Advocates of revelation) victory over the Mu'tazilites (Advocates of reason) in the ensued debate (Enayet, 1982, pp.7-8). The closing of the gates of *ijtihad* nailed the coffin on the Islamic sciences, as Sardar (p.484) put it. Muslims abandoned the scientific spirit, Christian Europe continued to make strides in science and technology, making inventions till it

culminated in the Industrial Revolution towards the end of the 18th century (Smith 1952; Perry, Peden and Von Laue, 1995; Beckwith and Biggs, 2004). Ultimately, the Industrial Revolution made (European) Imperialism a necessity and a possibility; humanity bear the brunt henceforth.

Over the many centuries since, Muslims have been lethargic about scientific pursuit concentrating on “maintaining the purity of religion”. The West and other parts of the world dominate the scientific and technological scene, Muslims (and Africans, for different historical reasons) continue to imitate (at best) and be consumers of scientific and technological innovations emanating from the West. As Oluwatoki (2024, p.144) put it, nothing today stops the Muslims from excelling in science, technology and innovation as of old except perhaps their determination.

For advocating that Muslims hold on to religion and morality while the West champion Science and Technology, Gulen definitely took the path of the ‘Ash’arites. Today’s Muslims as a collective should reconsider this option and take a position on this crucial issue. By this, we are making a case for collective memory on the part of the Muslims and the West. Gulen (2000, p. 38) advocated that people should forget the past just for the sake of establishing dialogue. The fact remains that the past is not easily readily forgotten. It constitutes people’s collective memory; buried deep in the psyche of individual members, it will always resurface especially when it is excited by what Oluwatoki (2021) calls the “Menace of History”. As Ibn Khaldun emphasized, the past resembles the present as water resembles water (Rosenthal, 2015).

IN THE ABSENCE OF AN ISLAMIC WORLD: MUSLIM — WEST RELATIONS IN GULEN’S EYES

To Gulen, an Islamic world does not exist today; only places where Muslims live do. This is because Islam is not being followed as a faith; rather, it has become a way of living, a culture. As he surmised this argument, there is today, “Islam of the individuals” (Gulen, 2000, p.130). One has to carefully consider the words of this great educator to understand what he meant. Islam has always been a way of living, a way of life. As a worldview, Islam is the cultural template for Muslim life. To be followed as a faith, it is a religion. We do not believe that many Muslims will agree with Gulen that Islam is not being followed as a faith.

To the extent that there is no universal state, the Caliphate as of the medieval period, or many states, all Shari’ah-ruled, it could be said that there is no Islamic world (of states and governance). To Gulen, there is a dominant Muslim culture but no Islamic culture. If by Islamic culture he meant a state or community where life is regulated by strict Islamic legal provisions, he will be right. One would be comfortable with the phrase Muslim culture, for culture refers to a people’s worldview and a way of life. But is there a dominant Muslim culture? Where is it? What is it?

It is understandable that the Shaykh might be speaking with a particular audience in mind. The distinction between Islamic world and Muslim world however is at best superfluous. For example, according to Gulen (p.78), “We Muslims have a system of beliefs with different history and essence; we have some basic things to give to the West — our understanding and view of humanity.” It can be assumed that ‘we’ in this statement has no bearing with his claim of “Islam of the individuals”. The statement above puts all Muslims in a box. Yet the (European) Westphalia arrangement (1648), the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) partitioning (of Africa), and the United Nations state system (1945) have

separated us into enclaves. We have been ‘made’ secularists and fundamentalists as a result of our exposure to alternative education and culture. Western civilization is Judeo-Christian but it is not a single entity. If Christian ethics, as we have shown, is an amalgam of pre-Christian and Christian ethos, and if the West has ended up, post-Enlightenment, in Materialist/Communist and positivist/post-modern intellectual legacy, how would the Muslim — Christian/West dialogue go? It seems that, for obvious reasons, Muslim — Christian, Muslim world — West relations are more complicated than Shaykh Gulen presented it.

But Gulen has presented us with a general template for dialogue and for Muslim — Christian relations. To be successful Gulenists, we need to work out a modality to engage with not just “the gulf” of the Abrahamic faiths, but inclusive of other faiths.

Dialogue will not be just on religion and general (religious) universal values, we have to factor in the political, economic, social, cultural, ethical and strategic divides that are contemporary to us. We have to come together in the Gulen spirit to work on bridging the gulf between our minds. The bottom line is, Gulen was convinced that humanity can live in peace and harmony. We have been divided for so long, ironically by religion, which is meant to bind us by our humanity. We can retrace our steps but it is not as simple as Gulen presented it. He has thrown the challenge to us to work on this path for the sake of our humanity.

It can be said without fear of contradiction that Shaykh Gulen was being apologetic in many respects. He was of the opinion that “Islam has nothing to do with theocracy” (Can, 1995 in Tughra Books 2012, p.121). This was expressed in a Newspaper/News Magazine interview. The Question read, “In Islam, is there despotism or theocracy as the media assert”? To have equated despotism with theocracy was suggestive. Gulen’s answer was confusing. Perhaps there is neither “official clerical hierarchy” nor a clerical system in Islam. Such system however is reminiscent of the Medinese political system practiced by the Prophet and the *Khulafa’ur-Rashidun* — the rightly-guided caliphs. In any case, historically, there have been a few theocratic states; in Masina and Sokoto (Sudanic Africa) (Clarke, 1982) and in modern Iran. The Sokoto clerical rule was a monarchy of the clerical family. Iran is a full “official clerical hierarchy” subordinating the state apparatus under the cleric (Abdul, 1976; Limbert, 1987; Milami, 1988; Clement, 1998; Oluwatoki, 2024).

If Khomeini Iran is reason to deny theocracy being part of Islamic political system, what is? It is apparently not monarchy imported from other cultures starting with the Umayyad after the collapse of the Classical Caliphate and which dominated Islamic political history (Enayat, 1982). It is also not the monarchy as practiced in many modern Arab (and Gulf) states largely the creation of European colonial powers in the Middle East. Gulen did not elaborate on this sweeping statement but it is a pertinent question in the Islamic Political Thought scholarship. Its clarification will help us discern who represent(s) the Muslims in inter-faith dialogue and inter-civilization debate.

CONCLUSION

Shaykh Fethullah Gulen was a colossus of a preacher, educator and teacher and mobilizer for good deeds. A great intellectual, he left to us a legacy of continuous probing and with us a legacy of engaging others with deep thought and courage and not through withdrawal or violence. His life and career constitute a great leap in humanity seeking meaning for our existence especially in a world

turned against itself. His patience and tact were legendary; giving credence to the claim that God is with the patient and the steadfast. His power of persuasion is reflected in how through his lectures and speeches, he motivated committed individuals to open, through non-governmental organizations, schools across Turkey and around the world. By so doing, he achieved his goal of providing a particular type of education for the younger generation.

Much is to be learnt from how he managed to maintain balance, so to speak, between the secularists and the fundamentalists in Turkey. He was not a politician; he agitated the political class by his stance on public affairs. He did not belong to any *tariqah*; he made a strong case for the spiritual contributions of Sufism. By his acts and by the way he lived, Gulen could be said to be Sufi at heart (Gibb, 1975; chapter 8).

Not out to dabble into politics, his positions on policy matters and the movement that he inspired were threat enough to the secularist Turkish state. His response to accusation by Turkish secular government that he was behind a coup to topple the government was apposite:

... He was not seeking to establish an Islamic regime but did support efforts to ensure that the government treated ethnic and ideological differences as a cultural Mosaic, not a reason for discrimination (Franz, 2000 in Tughra Books, 2012, p.94).

To the secular government, the businesses and schools run by Gulen's followers "sow the seeds of an Islamic regime". Their apprehension is understandable considering the pattern and methods of Hasan al-Bana's Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its eventual "take over" of the Egyptian State (Osman, 2016).

Gulen's position and arguments can be contested depending on the convictions of the contestants. According to Michel (2001, p.107), both 'right' and 'left' — secular and religious — attacked Gulen in Turkey since he refused to take sides. He offered instead a future oriented approach, hoping to move beyond the on-going debate. Gulen was intentional in being a "one-man riot"; his offence was attracting to himself a community of 'moderates' making a difference. He was aware of the threat he constituted especially to the government. He was an epitome of courage.

The greatest challenge for Muslims, individual and groups, is not to take Gulen's ideas and arguments at surface level. Muslims have to interrogate his ideas and arguments and his method. His achievements have to be appraised against the contemporary issues that Muslims have with others. What actually are the roles of Muslims as individuals, communities, pressure groups, in government, in commerce and in the professions? How do Muslims navigate the oceans of life and not founder in the quest of *Akhirah* — Hereafter? Since he was so concerned about, we all living in harmony — Muslims, Christians and indeed all adherents of religions — taking on this onerous task of working for international peace and security makes us all Gulenists.

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