

Present and Potential Impact of the Spiritual Tradition of Islam on Contemporary Muslims: From Ghazali to Gülen

by Y. Alp Aslandogan

Western analysts of trends in the contemporary Islamic world often overestimate the impact of contemporary Sufi orders and/or underestimate the impact of the spiritual tradition of Islam. Among the elements of the spiritual tradition conducive to religious pluralism is the 'mirror' concept: every human is seen as a mirror of God in three aspects: reflecting the attributes and names of God as His work of art, reflection through dependence on God, and reflection through actions God commands or commends. Since only the last aspect is voluntary, every human, regardless of creed, is a mirror of God in at least the first two aspects. This is a potent argument for peaceful coexistence in religious diversity. The perspective of the spiritual tradition is emphatically inclusive and compassionate and naturally lends itself to non-violence, going beyond mere tolerance to hospitality and friendship. There are important impediments that prevent this perspective from having a greater impact: (1) the literalist opposition to flexible interpretation of concepts from the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, and the wide definition of innovation or heresy ('*bid'a*'); (2) deviations of some Sufi orders and subsequent criticisms by orthodox Muslims; and (3) the impact of the politicisation of religion by some groups and political moves by certain Sufi orders.

This paper argues that the only approach that has a chance of influencing the majority of contemporary Muslims in positive ways without being open to criticism is the 'balanced' spiritual tradition, after the style of the Companions, sometimes called *tasawwuf*, which strives to harmonise the outer dimensions of Islamic law and worship with the inner dimension of spiritual disciplines firmly rooted in the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition. This paper will present an analysis of this 'balanced' spiritual tradition in Islam, from Ghazali, through Rumi, to Gülen.

Panel:
The Gülen Movement in
the Muslim World 2

Venue:
D202,
Clement House, LSE

27.10.07 Panels	Parellel Session 1	Parellel Session 2
9:30-11:30		
13:00-15:00		
15:10-17:00		Presentation: 11

Y. Alp Aslandogan: author; editor of *The Fountain* magazine; adjunct faculty member at Prairie View A&M University. Currently serving as Vice-President of the Institute of Interfaith Dialog (IID), he develops modules and instructional material for universities on topics such as interfaith dialogue, Sufism, democracy and religion, and Muslim responses to globalisation. He has published articles and gives seminars on several topics, including the relationship of science and religion, lesser-known aspects of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (upon him be peace) such as his educational methods, and common cultural values among the world's major religions. Among recent publications: co-edited *Muslim Citizens of the Globalized World*, *Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (IID Press). Current projects: a book on spiritual time management, and an illustrated Qur'an commentary in English.

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