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27.10.07

SATURDAY

Towards an understanding of Gülen's methodology

by *Oliver Leaman*

Panel:
Evaluation of Gülen's
Thought and Methodology

Venue:
Old Theatre,
LSE

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

There is an apparent paradox at the heart of the Gülen approach. On the one hand there is a determination to present a version of Islam that is rational, inclusive, progressive and tolerant. The broad aim is to show Islam to be a universal faith, one that has no difficulties in coexisting with other religions and indeed with those who have no religion at all. On the other hand, Islam is definitely portrayed as the superior form of belief, often because it is seen as incorporating in the best possible ways rational and spiritual virtues present in many other approaches to understanding the nature of the world. Yet how can Islam be represented as one among many and also as the first among many?

This interesting feature of the Gülen methodology is shown to rest on a basic aspect of the *Hanifi/Murji'i* theological approach, which can also be seen as paradoxical. The inability to define precisely the nature of belief and who is a believer suggests an uncertainty about what the Muslim actually believes in. It also implies a difficulty in identifying who is a Muslim and who is not, and that might be regarded as a basic issue in religion.

The lack of definition in the *Hanafiyya* is precisely its strength. This is something taken up well by the Gülen movement. Religious boundaries are often blurred, and believers may wish to hold onto a variety of beliefs not all of which fit neatly into a particular traditional faith. In prioritising Islam the Gülen movement expresses clearly its opinion that within the parameters of Islam is likely to be found the most truth and the best regimen as to how to live. Yet those parameters are not themselves strictly defined and allow for much change and development.

Oliver Leaman

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Oliver Leaman: has written widely on Islamic and Jewish philosophy, and has taught at a number of universities, including the University of Khartoum. He is the author of *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, (Cambridge University, 1995), *Moses Maimonides* (Curzon, 1997) and *Averroes and his Philosophy* (Curzon, 1997). He is the editor of *Friendship East and West* (Curzon, 1996), *The Future of Philosophy* (Routledge, 1998) and co-editor of the *History of Islamic Philosophy* (Routledge, 1996) and the *History of Jewish Philosophy* (Routledge, 1997).