



26.10.07
FRIDAY

Robustness and Civility: Themes from Fethullah Gülen as Resource and Challenge for Government, Muslims and Civil Society in the UK

by Paul Weller

Panel:
Civility and Non-Violence
in Gülen's Thought and
Practice

Venue:
B202,
Brunei Gallery, SOAS

26.10.07 Panels	Parallel Session 1	Parallel Session 2
9:30-11:30		
13:00-15:00		Presentation 05
15:10-17:00		

The 7/7 (2005) attack on London Transport by Muslims brought up in the UK shocked the Government, many Muslims, and the wider civil society. Subsequently, the UK's 'multi-culturalist' policy consensus has been subject to intensive questioning. Politicians and some parts of civil society have challenged a perceived 'separatism' among Muslims; emphasised a need for shared values and social cohesion; and advocated the promotion of 'moderate Islam' and 'moderate Muslims'.

This paper argues that, in legitimising simplistic distinctions between 'good' (understood as 'liberal' or 'modernist') and 'bad' or 'suspect' (understood as 'traditionalist', 'radical' or 'fundamentalist') Muslims and forms of Islam, there is a risk of eliding the condemnation of terrorist crimes conducted on religious grounds into the criminalisation, or at least social marginalisation, of religious conservatism and/or radicalism. This approach, it is argued, is more likely to undermine the development of inclusive approaches to the common good and that what is needed instead are authentically Islamic approaches that can offer both a resource and a challenge to Government, Muslims and the wider civil society.

Finally, it is argued that such resource and challenge can be found in themes from Fethullah Gülen's teaching. Gülen, on Islamic grounds, condemns terrorism in the name of religion. Further, being rooted in a confident Ottoman Muslim civilisational heritage and having during the period of the Turkish Republic engaged with both ideological 'secularism' and political 'Islamism', he also offers a critique of the political instrumentalisation of Islam while arguing for an active Muslim engagement with the wider (religious and secular) society based on a distinctive Islamic vision characterised by a robustness and civility that could make a positive contribution in the present UK context.

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Paul Weller: Professor of Inter-Religious Relations at the University of Derby and Head of Research and Commercial Development in its Faculty of Education, Health and Sciences; Visiting Fellow in the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford; and Vice Chair of the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby. Current interests: issues in the relationships between religion, state and society. Recent publications: *Time for Change: Reconfiguring Religion, State and Society* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005) and 'Fethullah Gülen, Religions, Globalisation and Dialogue', in R. Hunt and Y. Aslandoğan (eds.), *Muslim Citizens of the Globalized World: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (Somerset, NJ: The Light Inc. and IID Press, 2006). He is editor of *Religions in the UK: Directory, 2007-2010* (Derby: University of Derby and Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby, 2007).