

PREACHING BY EXAMPLE AND LEARNING FOR LIFE: UNDERSTANDING THE GÜLEN *HİZMET* IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS PHILANTHROPY AND CIVIL RELIGION

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Abstract

The Gülen movement, or *hizmet*, is often misunderstood, and this is in large measure because it is unlike anything else in the Muslim world, though the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama mass-based organisations of Indonesia do bear some resemblance.

However, there is no good reason to limit comparisons to the Muslim world. As a social movement motivated by religious values and the ideals of selfless service, engaged in philanthropic endeavour and active in the civil sphere, the Gülen *hizmet* deserves comparison with other such movements around the globe.

This paper looks outside the geographic and cultural context of the Muslim world to demonstrate that the Gülen *hizmet* shares much in common with many Western, Christian, philanthropic initiatives in education and public discourse of the past three centuries, particularly in North America. The utility of this comparison is that it helps us to understand better aspects of the Gülen *hizmet* that cannot be easily understood in the limited context of the Muslim world. It also helps break down some of the ‘us and them’ barriers that divide Christians and Muslims, and east and west, by allowing us to recognise common concerns, values and shared experiences.

The paper also explores the concept of civil religion in the twenty-first century, examines ways in which religious philanthropic activity can contribute to the development of non-exclusivist civil religion and apply these insights to the Gülen *hizmet* to argue that the *hizmet* models an interesting modern Islamic alternative to Islamism.

A New and Different Kind of Islamic Movement

The Gülen movement, or *hizmet* (the word literally means ‘service’ but is also used by some to describe the Gülen movement and will be used interchangeably with the ‘Gülen movement’ in this paper) a vast loosely connected network of autonomous schools, universities, NGOs and media and publishing enterprises, is often misunderstood.¹ This is in large measure because it is unlike anything else in the Muslim world. It looks, superficially, somewhat like a Muslim Brotherhood social movement but closer examination of its core doctrine and values soon reveals that it is in no respects an Islamist movement. Whereas Islamist movements like the Brotherhood are convinced that the application of *shari’ah* through radical (that is to say, from the roots up) political and legislative transformation of the state represents a panacea to the ills of modern secular society the Gülen *hizmet* has no desire for a religious state. Speaking of Islamism Gülen counters:

This vision of Islam as a totalising ideology is totally against the spirit of Islam, which promotes the rule of law and openly rejects oppression against any segment of society.²

Rejecting the coercive application of *shari’ah* the Gülen *hizmet* believes instead that the best way to achieve a better society is by the personal development of individuals through education and by the setting of a positive example (*temsil*).³ Like the Muslim Brotherhood, Fethullah Gülen and the movement around is openly committed to *tadjud*, or renewal, and *ijtihad*, or the continuing interpretation of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Speaking of his own position Gülen observed that:

The community members are required to obey the laws that one can identify as “higher principles” as well as laws made by humans. Islam has no objection to undertaking *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *istinbat* (deductive reasoning), and *istikhrāj* (derivation) in the interpretation of *Shari’ah* principles.⁴

Unlike most associated with the Brotherhood, however, Gülen and his followers are deeply committed to tolerance, the embracing of pluralism and the pursuit of dialogue, and as a result is much more progressive in outlook and much more productive in *ijtihad*.⁵ Indeed, as Ihsan Yilmaz has so evocatively put it, the Gülen movement achieves *ijtihad* and *tadjud* by conduct.⁶

1 Bekim Agai (2003) ‘The Gülen Movement’s Islamic Ethic of Education in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.53-4, 60-1, 67.

2 M. Fethullah Gülen (2005) ‘An Interview with Fethullah Gülen (translated by Zeki Saritoprak and Ali Unal)’, The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.452.

3 On *temsil* refer to Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) ‘The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.41; and to Elisabeth Ozdalga (2003) ‘Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen’ in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.86.

4 M. Fethullah Gülen (2005) ‘An Interview with Fethullah Gülen (translated by Zeki Saritoprak and Ali Unal)’, The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, p.450.

5 John O. Voll (2003) ‘Fethullah Gülen: Transcending Modernity in the New Islamic Discourse’, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.245-7.

6 Ihsan Yilmaz (2003) ‘Ijtihad and Tadjud by Conduct: The Gülen Movement’, Gülen’ in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.208-37.

Although there really is nothing quite like the Gülen *hizmet* in the Arab ‘heartland’ of the Muslim world the giant mass-based Islamic organizations of Indonesia - Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama - do bear some resemblance. Like Nahdlatul Ulama the Gülen *hizmet* is a modern articulation of rural, Sufistic, traditional Islam. It is more like the urban Islamic modernist Muhammadiyah, however, in its approach to professional philanthropic endeavour, including modern non-religious education.⁷ Similar movements, though not so extensive, can be found elsewhere on what some might call the periphery, and others the leading edge, of Muslim world. There is no good reason, however, to limit comparisons only to the Muslim world. As a social movement motivated by religious values and the ideals of service and selflessness, engaged in philanthropic endeavour and active in the civil sphere the Gülen *hizmet* deserves comparison with other such movements around the globe, both in the present and over the past several centuries.

This paper examines the thinking of Fetullah Gülen as demonstrated in the social movement that he has inspired. In particular it examines the approach of Gülen and the *hizmet* to learning and to modernity. It concludes by arguing that to fully understand the movement we need to look outside the geographic and cultural context of the Muslim world. It seeks to demonstrate that the Gülen *hizmet* shares much in common with many of the western, Christian, philanthropic initiatives in education and public discourse of the past three centuries, particularly those found in North America. Hakan Yavuz has described the members of the Gülen *hizmet* as being Turkish Puritans.⁸ It is easy to dismiss such phrases as being throw-away lines, especially when they are used by the media without any great insight into who the 18th century New England Puritans were. In fact there are a number of strong parallels between the Puritans in general and the *hizmet* leaders and between Gülen and Puritan thinkers such as Jonathan Edwards, Quaker thinkers such as John Woolman and, to some extent, Anglican thinkers such as John Wesley and Samuel Johnson. There is an even stronger correlation with subsequent movements in Christian education, both Protestant and Catholic, through to the present time. The utility of this comparison is that it both helps us to better understand many aspects of the Gülen *hizmet* that cannot otherwise be easily understood in the limited context of the Muslim world. It also helps break down some of the ‘us and them’ barriers of otherness that divide Christians and Muslims, and east and west, by allowing us to recognize common concerns and values and shared experiences. The paper will also briefly explore the concept of civil religion in the Twenty-first Century, examine ways in which religious philanthropic activity can contribute to the development of non-exclusivist civil religion and apply these insights to the Gülen *hizmet* to argue that the *hizmet* models an interesting modern Islamic alternative to Islamism.

Islam and the Modern Turkish State

State Islam in Turkey, the official sanctioned expression of religion that Ihsan Yilmaz has dubbed Lausanian Islam, is a direct product of the philosophy behind Turkey’s revolution.⁹

7 For more on this see Greg Barton (2006) “Turkey’s Gülen *hizmet* and Indonesia’s neo-modernist NGOs; remarkable examples of progressive Islamic thought and civil society activism in the Muslim world”, in Fethi Mansouri and Shahram Akbarzadeh (eds), *Political Islam and Human Security*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, p.140-160.

8 Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) ‘The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans’, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.19-47.

9 Ihsan Yilmaz, (2005) ‘State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey’, *The Muslim World* Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.386-90

The modern Turkish state's approach to religion is based on the conviction of the Kemalist establishment, the inheritors of the legacy of Atatürk, that the state is able to shape and direct religious practice and belief through the comprehensive application of law and intervention of state institutions.¹⁰ This means that the state feels that it needs to maintain control over religious expression in the public sphere. As the military remains a very powerful institution of state power in Turkey, and has intervened directly via coups (in 1960 and 1971) and less directly via 'soft coups' (the political upheavals in 1980 and 28 February 1997 are widely understood to be 'soft coups') the democratically elected government represents but one of several elements of the Turkish state.¹¹ This dynamic is sometimes alluded to by referring to a 'deep state' shadowing and intimidating the elected executive and legislature. The military claims an important role for itself as protector of Turkish secularism and the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The secularism of modern Turkey is directly modelled on French laicism and as such is profoundly different from the secularism of the English-speaking world.¹²

Turkish laicism did not simply call for a separation of 'church' and state but aspired to reserve for the state the right to direct all aspects of religious expression outside of the individual and the family home.¹³ On the one hand, certain kinds of religious organizations and social movements in the civil sphere are expressly proscribed, most notably the centuries-old Sufi *tarekat*, or Sufi orders. On the other hand Islamic belief practise is actively encouraged and supported through state agencies. Religious education, through the Imam Hatip is directly controlled by the state through the Department of Religious Affairs. This department oversees the training of state imam and issues and official Friday sermon which is to be read in every mosque across Turkey. It also directs an extensive program of providing *fatwa*, or authoritative religious rulings, on all manner of issues relating to Islam and modern life.¹⁴

Modern Turkish secularism has proven broadly popular. The overwhelming majority of modern Turks, including the majority of practicing, socially conservative, Muslims, have no desire for Turkey to become an Islamic state. Nevertheless, there are, broadly speaking, two communities that have expressed a degree of concern with, or opposition to, the state's control of religious life.

The first, and largest is the broad community of traditional sufistic Anatolian Muslims from the thousands of villages, towns and small cities across the interior of rural Turkey. Socially conservative, deeply religious and constituting a large portion of all Turkish citizens these 'Anatolian Muslims' had little reason to concern themselves with disputing Turkish laicism when they were living in small rural communities. In recent decades, however, tens of millions of these people have moved to Istanbul, Turkey's mega-city, to Ankara, Turkey's capital,

10 Ihsan Yilmaz (2005) 'State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey', The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.392-3.

11 Yavuz, M. Hakan and Esposito, John (2003) 'Introduction: Islam in Turkey: Retreat from the Secular Path?' in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p. xxiv-xxv.

12 Yavuz, M. Hakan and Esposito, John (2003) 'Introduction: Islam in Turkey: Retreat from the Secular Path?' in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p. xx-xxiii.

13 It of course never fully achieved the degree of control that it aspired to. Nevertheless, its claim on the state's right to direct public life gave it a powerful weapon for the repression of social movements that it felt threatened by and gave to the military a useful pretext for intervening in political affairs in the name of upholding Turkish laicism.

14 Ihsan Yilmaz (2005) 'State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey', The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.390-2.

and to Turkey's large coastal cities like Izmir. Bringing with them their traditional styles of dress and ways of living to the burgeoning, semi-planned seas of high density suburbs ringing the old cities. Inevitably, there is a degree of friction between the two cultures: the culture of cosmopolitan urbanites and the culture of the recently arrived from the Anatolian interior. The former are accustomed to religion being a largely private affair, the latter experience it as the glue that holds communities together. Many of these new settlers were drawn to the earlier Islamist parties, such as the Welfare Party of former prime minister Erbakan. In recent years, and in much greater numbers, they have been attracted to the post-Islamist phenomenon of Prime Minister Erdogan's Virtue Party (AKP). No doubt part of the appeal of these parties is their advocacy of a more flexible approach to secularism combined with their empathy for Anatolian Islam. A large part of their appeal, however, likely lies in the perception that they are advocates for the interests of the working and lower-middle classes.

The second community uncomfortable with Turkish laicism is comprised of the very much smaller number of people who are drawn explicitly to the ideology of Islamism. Ironically, the Islamists share with the hardline Kemalists the conviction that the state is able to shape and direct religious practice and belief through the application of law and the control of key institutions. And like the Kemalists they not only believe that this is possible they also believe that it is desirable (naturally, however, they have very different views of what role religion should play in public life). This means that the Islamists have focused their long-term efforts on achieving political power in order to be able to use the state mechanisms of law and institutions to create a more Islamic nation and society.

Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941), and those who lead the *hizmet* that puts his ideas into practice, is openly and consistently critical of Islamism. Gülen's criticism of Islamism is deeply rooted in a progressive understanding of Islam that emphasizes rationality and open-minded enquiry marked by tolerance of difference and pluralism and a deep love for humanity.¹⁵

Given his deeply religious, socially conservative rural background, and the fact that he continues to faithfully hold to an conventional *Hanafi/Sunni* orthodox position in matters of theology, it is remarkable just how broadly ecumenical Fethullah Gülen has become.¹⁶ Inspired by Said Nursi Gülen has long been optimistic about the potential for Muslims to work together with the People of the Book – as Jews and Christians are traditionally recognised to be. Writing recently Gülen implies a respectful appraisal of earlier prophetic books and their adherents well beyond the understanding of conservative Islamic scholars when he remarked:

Regardless of how their adherents implement their faith in their daily lives, such as generally accepted values as love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood, and freedom are all values exalted by religion. Most of these values are accorded the highest precedence in the messages brought by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, upon them be peace, as well as in the messages of Buddha and even Zarathustra, Lao-Tzu, Confucius, and the Hindu prophets.¹⁷

As a progressive thinker Gülen believes that the future can be better than the past and that rather than wistfully looking back to a forever lost 'golden age' Muslims, together with other

15 The emphasis on tolerance and the practise of dialogue evolved to assume central importance in the thinking of Fethullah Gülen and the work of the movement from the mid-1990s onwards, refer to: Bekim Agai (2003) 'The Gülen Movement's Islamic Ethic of Education in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.64-5.

16 Elisabeth, Ozdalga (2005) 'Redeemer or Outsider? The Gülen Community in the Civilizing Process), The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.441.

17 Fethullah Gülen (2004) *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, New Jersey: Light, pp.75-6.

people of good will, should work to achieve societies that are progressively more just, compassionate and decent. This progressive outlook lies at the heart of the hizmet's focus on education and the development of individual potential through learning and discipline. For Gülen secular democracy represents the best and only appropriate approach to governance in the modern state. He argues that whilst the Qur'an and the Sunnah speak clearly of religious values that should be reflected and upheld in the state they do not contain a blueprint for politics.

Islam does not propose a certain unchangeable form of government or attempt to shape it. Instead, Islam establishes fundamental principles that orient a governments general character, leaving it to the people to choose the type and form of government according to time and circumstances.¹⁸

Gülen frequently endorses democracy specifically, arguing that it is the most appropriate form of government for the modern period and one that is entirely compatible with Islam:

Democracy and Islam are compatible. Ninety-five percent of Islamic rules deal with private life and the family. Only 5 percent deals with matters of the state, and this could be arranged only within the context of democracy. If some people are thinking of something else, such as an Islamic state, this country's history and social conditions do not allow it ... Democratization is an irreversible process in Turkey.¹⁹

Gülen is generally seen to draw directly on the intellectual heritage of the influential and greatly loved Sufi scholar and writer Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.²⁰ And indeed, an examination of Gülen's writing reveals it to be substantially built upon the foundation laid by Nursi, who in turn drew upon the great Anatolian Sufi Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi (d. 1276) and the Indian writers Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi (1564-1624) and Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1703-1762) amongst others.²¹ Members of the Gülen hizmet, like hundreds of thousands of other admirers of Nursi meet regularly to read and discuss his multi-volume thematic commentary on the Qur'an, the *Risale-i Nur*, or *Treatise of Light*. For this reason the Gülen *hizmet* is seen to represent a significant component of the broader so-called *Nurcu* movement. Gülen is, however, not simply a follower of Nursi. Rather he is a significant thinker, writer and leader in his own right. Much of Gülen's work essentially takes the form of a synthesis, rearticulation, or fresh application of the earlier work of Nursi and others. And like Nursi and many other Islamic scholars Gülen frequently returns in his writing to the lived example the Prophet Muhammad

18 Gülen, M. Fethullah (2001), 'A Comparative Approach to Islam and Democracy', SAIS Review 21, no. 2. p. 134

19 Gülen interviewed in Sabah, 27 January 1995 and quoted in Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) 'The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans', in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.28.

20 On links with Nursi, refer to: M. Hakan Yavuz, and John Esposito (2003) 'Introduction: Islam in Turkey: Retreat from the Secular Path?' in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p. xxvii-xxviii. Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) 'Islam in the Public Sphere: The Case of the Nur Movement', in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.1-18. Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) 'The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans', in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.19-47. See also: Ahmet T. Kuru (2003) *Fethullah Gülen's Search for a Middle Way Between Modernity and Muslim Tradition*, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.118-9.

21 Zeki Sariotoprak and Sidney Griffith (2005) 'Fetullah Gülen and the 'People of the Book': A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue', *The Muslim World* Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.331-2

for inspiration and direction. Nevertheless there are several significant areas where Gülen is a thinker and leader of striking originality and innovation. In general terms Gülen, like Nursi before him, can be described as a Sufi and his thinking is richly infused with Sufi imagery, values and ideas, including most notably focus on the heart, the inward being, the seat of both wisdom and spirituality. Growing up in the small village of Korucuk Gülen, however, is not a traditional Sufi and does not align with any particular Sufi order, or *tarekat*, rather he is, in the evocative formulation of Zeki Saritoprak, ‘a sufi in his own way’.²²

A disciplined child growing up in a pious household Gülen came to religious life at an early age. He recalls that he “began praying when I was four years old and never missed a prayer since.”²³ As was the case with many village boys Gülen was first taught to recite the Qur’an by his mother, Rafi’a and his father, Ramiz Efendi, who taught him Persian as well as Arabic, and was only later, at the age of ten, set under the tutelage of his first formal teacher, Muhammad Lufti Efendi (d.1954) who soon succeeded in helping him commit the entire Qur’an to memory.²⁴ Significantly, Lufti Efendi, a well regarded Sufi poet and teacher was a member of the Qadiri order whilst Ramiz Efendi was a member of the Naqshbandi order. These orthodox Shari’ah-oriented Sufi orders were popular in rural Turkey at the time.

One of the areas where Gülen has made his greatest contribution to Islamic thought is in his exploration of learning. Gülen is a passionate advocate of learning in the broadest sense in every field of enquiry and dialogue. This is reflected both in the *hizmet*’s direct engagement with educational initiatives and with a wide range of media and publishing initiatives designed to inform and engage.

Not surprisingly, given that it is a deeply religious movement, the *hizmet* does undertake a significant amount of activity relating directly to religious teaching and encouragement. Indeed the movement’s origins are rooted in the regular reading group meetings focusing on Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur referred to above. In most Nurcu communities these reading groups are known as *dershane* but in the Gülen *hizmet* community they are referred to as *isik evler*, or lighthouses. Fethullah Gülen trained as an official state *imam* in an Imam Hatip, an Islamic college run by the Department of Religious Affairs for the training of *imam*. His first appointment as an imam began in 1966 in the large, cosmopolitan, city of Izmir on Turkey’s Mediterranean coast.²⁵ Gülen formally retired from the Department of Religious Affairs in 1981. In the late 1960s Gülen established several *isik evler* in Izmir. These grew steadily in number through the 1970s in Izmir and Istanbul and became the nucleolus for the *hizmet*.²⁶

22 For an extensive discussion of this refer to: Zeki Saritoprak (2003) ‘Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way’, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.156-69. See also Thomas Michel (2005) ‘Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen’, The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.341-58.

23 Quoted in Lester R. Kurtz (2005) ‘Gülen’s Paradox: Combining Commitment and Tolerance’, The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, p.375.

24 Zeki Saritoprak and Sidney Griffith (2005) ‘Fetullah Gülen and the ‘People of the Book’: A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue’, The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.330-1. See also Osman Bakar (2005) ‘Gülen on Religion and Science: A Theological Perspective’, The Muslim World Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.360.

25 In Izmir Gülen was attached to the Kestanepazari Qur’anic School. From this base he was able to build a circuit of regular talks in coffeehouses, community centres, private homes and mosques in an around Izmir. Refer to: Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) ‘The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans’, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.20

26 Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) ‘The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans’, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.30-5.

From its earliest days the *hizmet* has been involved with writing and publishing. The movement's first magazine, *Siziniti*, launched in the early 1980s, is a popular publication directed towards a lay audience and intended to promote discussion and learning about science. It aims to foster interest in science and to demonstrate that rational scientific enquiry and religious faith are not incompatible. *Siziniti*, a Turkish magazine, was joined several years later by the English language publication, *Fountain*, edited in Istanbul and printed in New Jersey and aimed at fostering a general interest in religion and spirituality. The Articles in *Fountain* deal mostly, but not exclusively with Islam and generally reflect a tolerant, Sufistic orientation and a modern articulation of traditionalist Islam. A sister publication of *Fountain*, *Dialogue* (joined in Australia, in 2004, by *Dialogue Australia Asia*) was established specifically to encourage inter-religious dialogue.

In the field of learning the Gülen *hizmet* is best known for its loosely connected network of more than 500 modern secular private schools and six universities that sprung up across Turkey and throughout Central Asia and some 50, or so, nations around the world, beginning in 1983 with one school in Izmir and another in Istanbul.²⁷ In addition to these schools there also a handful of well regarded secular colleges and half a dozen universities such as Fatih University in Istanbul and Ankara. These schools, many of which have been deliberately established in some of the poorest and most needy parts of the world, are generally very well regarded and achieve a high standard of scholastic achievement in neighbourhoods, districts and nations not normally accustomed to excellence in education. What makes them so remarkable in the context of the Muslim world is their commitment to secular modern learning open to students of all backgrounds. The schools, regardless of the nation in which they operate and the legislation that pertains to religious instruction in schools, adhere consistently to a secular curriculum. Where the state mandates an hour per week of religious instruction, as is the case in Turkey, the *hizmet* schools, of course, comply, but otherwise the schools are at least as secular in their teaching program and formal orientation as contemporary mainstream denomination Christian schools. In this respect they are very much like modern Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist or Catholic schools and as such don't have the overtly religious character of many independent Christian or Jewish schools.

There is no shortage of Islamic leaders calling for the construction of a new mosque in their neighbourhood. There are precious few such leaders, however, who urge their supporters to build schools rather than mosques and then not necessarily in their own neighbourhood but in foreign societies, to the benefit of both non-Muslim and Muslim students.

Although Gülen *hizmet* is becoming increasingly well-known outside Turkey for its schools and passion for education these schools are only one part of the *hizmet's* activism. Magazines *Sizinti*, *Fountain* and *Dialogue*. These publications represent modern religious magazines in the style of many contemporary Christian publications, such as *The Catholic World Report*,

27 Ahmet T. Kuru (2003) 'Fethullah Gülen's Search for a Middle Way Between Modernity and Muslim Tradition', in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.116. For a general overview of the schools network and related issues refer to Bekim Agai (2003) 'The Gülen Movement's Islamic Ethic of Education in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.48-68; to Thomas Michel (2003) 'Fethullah Gülen as Educator' in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.69-84; and to Elisabeth Ozdalga (2003) 'Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen' in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.85-114.

Christianity, The Christian Century, Christianity Today, Guideposts, and World. If they represented the movement's primary ventures in journalism and media this aspect of *hizmet's* activities would still warrant serious study but as we will see below there is much more to the movement's publishing activities than just 'religious publishing'. The moderate and generally inclusive approach to discussion of spirituality and modern life of these religious magazines would suggest that the religious character of the movement is comparable to that of the mainstream Christian denominations in the west. These publications portray a religious movement that is socially and doctrinally conservative yet clearly not fundamentalist in the manner of America's Christian right or its Islamist analogues in the Muslim world. The writings dealing with patterns of religious devotion and practise reveal a traditionalist orientation that shares common characteristics, in terms of reverence for places, peoples and events, with traditional Catholicism, Anglicanism/Episcopalianism and Lutherism. At the same time the movement's character is clearly forward-looking: optimistic about the future and the opportunities presented by modernity, and keen to adapt and contribute. There is, in general, in these publications a sense of the sort of values and principles associated with American civil religion and the humanitarianism and common decency of America's mid-west and the world of Norman Rockwell that is also manifested in secular magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, America's best-selling consumer magazine.

Alongside of these religious magazines the movement has published hundreds of books with explicitly religious themes. Isik Publishing, the Istanbul-based publishing house behind *Fountain* magazine is responsible for most of the Gülen movement's religious book publishing. The heart of its catalogue consists of works by Said Nursi, most notably the *Risale-i Nur*, and Fethullah Gülen. Alongside these are studies of Gülen's thought and devotional works dealing with the life of the Prophet Muhammad and with Ottoman religious life. In certain respects Isik Publishing is comparable to American Christian publishing houses such as Eerdmans, Intervarsity Press, Loyola Press Thomas Nelson and Zondervan.

Although these religious publications, both magazines and books, represent a vitally important aspect of the *hizmet's*, in terms of broad circulation and, arguably, of influence, the *hizmet's* wide-ranging initiatives in secular media are even more important. And it is these publications which represent some of the most remarkable aspects of the *hizmet's* activism. Here it becomes much more difficult to make comparisons can with western Christian movements. Contemporary Christian media in the English-speaking world, with a few notable exceptions, such as the Christian Science Monitor and some recent developments in radio and new media, tends to be inward looking and primarily concerned with explicitly religious issues.

The Gülen *hizmet* really began to 'go public' following the 1980 coup and the rise of the moderate, centrist, government of Turgut Ozal in 1982. Remarkably, beginning in the early 1980's, this civil sphere activism was manifested as much, or more, in secular initiatives as it was in conventional religious initiatives such as those in religious publishing noted above. Apart from the schools themselves, these secular activities were, and are, mostly defined by initiatives in intellectual inquiry and dialogue, taking the form of newspapers, current affairs magazines, television and radio stations and dialogue-orientated NGOs. Alongside of these secular initiatives are another kind of activism involving the development of loose networks of businessmen and associated institutions in finance and banking including the business network Is Hayati Dayanisma Dernegi (ISHAD) and the bank Bank Asya.²⁸ The latter are

28 Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) 'The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans', in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press,

vital in producing support for the school network but the media ventures themselves are self-financing businesses in themselves.

One of the first initiatives on this front was the launching of the daily national newspaper *Zaman* in Istanbul.²⁹ *Zaman* was founded in 1986 and quickly established a reputation for comprehensive, objective reporting directed by an editorial position that was perceived to be neutral and, unlike virtually every other major newspaper at the time, not aligned to any particular political camp or ideological position. In a market marked by overtly partisan periodicals *Zaman* was welcomed by readers seeking reliable reporting of current affairs and professional journalistic standards. With current circulation exceeding 700,000 copies per day it would appear that many of these readers have no connection with the Gülen movement and do not have a particular interest in its religious outlook. Some of *Zaman*'s writers take an overtly socially conservative on the issues that they write about but others are regarded as being relatively liberal and progressive in their stance. From its inception *Zaman* was intended to be a 'newspaper of record' along the lines of London's *The Times*, and *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Times of India*, *Karachi's Dawn*, and Indonesia's *Kompas*.

Apart from striving for objective and professional journalism *Zaman* is remarkable for its cutting-edge approach to developing the business of newspaper publishing. *Zaman* launched its online edition in 1996 placing it in an elite group of newspapers worldwide to make the move to cyberspace when usage of the internet was only just beginning.³⁰ Within several years of its establishment in Istanbul *Zaman* opened operations in four other Turkish cities and began producing regional editions outside Turkey. Today regional editions are printed and distributed in Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Germany, Romania, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Turkmenistan, and the US. *Zaman* also produces special international editions in local languages in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. *Zaman* also employs a remarkably complete array of foreign correspondents and stringers across the world, as reflected in its extensive reporting on world affairs. *Zaman* is assisted in maintaining this breadth of coverage through its association with its sister company CHA, one of Turkey's largest news agencies. Both *Zaman* and CHA are under the control of Feza Publications Incorporated which also has in it's the well-regarded weekly news magazine *Aksiyon* along with *Sizinti* and the theological journal *Yeni Umit*.

The CHA stable of print publications are undisputedly part of the Gülen movement but are remarkable not just for their professionalism but also for their non-sectarian outlook. In this respect they have few parallels in the world of Christian media. In some respects *Zaman* could be compared, for example, with the *Church of England Newspaper* but unlike *Zaman* the venerable *Newspaper*, which has been published since 1828, is largely concerned with matters relating to its particular religious community. So too, to a greater or lesser extent, is the case with the other Christian newspapers and magazines mentioned above. The closest parallel to *Zaman* is probably *The Christian Science Monitor*.

p.36-7.

29 Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) 'The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.36.

30 The 'internet' only began to be widely known by that name in 1996. Version 1.0 of Mosaic, the world's first widely-used web browser was released in 1993 and by the end of the following year, 1994, public interest in the internet could be said to have begun to spread beyond the technical and academic communities.

Founded in 1879, in Boston Massachusetts, by Mary Eddy Baker, The Church of Christ, Scientist, is a relatively small Christian denomination (its membership is thought to number no more than several hundred thousand strong) that sits uneasily on the outside of mainstream Protestantism. With its unusual emphasis on spiritual healing through prayer and the ultimate ‘unreality’ of sin, disease and death the church has been viewed with suspicion by many mainstream Christians since its earliest days. It was partly because of this and related general disillusionment with mainstream media that in 1908 Baker launched the *Christian Science Monitor* as a daily newspaper (published Monday through Friday) intended “to injure no man, but to bless all mankind”. From these unlikely beginnings and despite its name the *Monitor* has become a highly regarded reporter of American and international affairs, winning many plaudits, including seven Pulitzer prizes. The only indications of its religious connections are a single daily religious feature page (‘The Home Forum’) and a general avoidance of issues relating to medicine and disease.

Zaman and its sister CHA publications compare very favourably with *The Christian Science Monitor* in every respect, and arguably exceed it in several important respects, such as the breadth of outlook displayed by its editorial staff. Like the *Monitor*, *Zaman* was quick to take advantage of the internet, launching its first online presence in 1995, one year before the *Monitor*. Unlike the *Monitor*, however, *Zaman* and its CHA stable mates have met with consistently strong commercial success. Whereas the *Monitor* has struggled for years to expand circulation and turn a profit *Zaman* has gone from strength to strength. It is likely that one reason for the greater success of *Zaman* compared with the *Monitor* is that whereas the later was merely adding one more quality newspaper to a market already well-served with such publications *Zaman* was filling a hitherto unmet demand for objective, professional, non-partisan reporting and analysis. It is likely that this also is the reason that the Gülen movement has succeeded, where the *Monitor* has tried and failed, in expanding into electronic media.

Samanyolu Television was launched in January 1993. The initiative represented a financial gamble at a time when private television programming was dominated by tabloid reporting and entertainment with poor production values and sensationalist content. Like the CHA print publications Samanyolu set out to provide non-sectarian, largely secular content of a high standard. The product soon found a market and the rather undercapitalised venture steadily consolidated its market position and commercial viability. Samanyolu came to achieve the sort of quality in programming for which the BBC (the British Broadcasting Commission) in Britain, PBS (the Public Broadcasting Service) in America and the ABC (the Australian Broadcasting Commission) are well regarded. Unlike the BBC, PBS and the ABC, however, Samanyolu remains an entirely commercial venture, albeit one driven by a similar philosophy of striving for quality and thoughtful programming in both current affairs and in popular entertainment, including drama production and general interest documentary and lifestyle programs.

A separate, but related aspect of the hizmet’s activities is found in the Journalists and Writers and Foundation (Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı – JWF) established in 1994.³¹ This very influential NGO goes beyond straightforward journalistic reporting and analysis to support strategic public intellectual initiatives in the promotion of dialogue. One of the Foundation’s most important activities is the hosting of a high level annual summer dialogue forum known as the Abant Platform (named after the lakeside location of its annual meetings) designed

31 Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) ‘The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans, in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.42.

to bring together disparate elements of the political and cultural elite to talk face to face about issues of pressing national importance.³² Each Abant Platform produces an Abant Declaration summing up the issues discussed. The first Abant Platform was held in July 1998 on the theme of 'Islam and Secularism'. The 1998 Abant Declaration, Ihsan Yilmaz observed:

attempts to redefine the meaning of laicism in accordance with the way it is practiced in Anglo-Saxon cultures. Moreover the Declaration reinterprets Islamic theology to respond to modern challenges. It was underscored in the declaration that revelation and reason do not conflict; individuals should use their reason to organize their social lives; the state should be neutral on beliefs and faiths prevalent in society; governance of the state cannot be based on the dominance of one religious tradition; secularism should expand individual freedoms and rights and should not exclude any person from the public sphere.³³

Subsequent Abant Platforms dealt with the related themes of 'Religion and State Relations' (July 1999), 'Islam and Democracy' (July 2000), and 'Pluralism' (July 2001). In April 2004 the Journalists and Writers Foundation took the Abant Platform offshore to America and held a successful forum meeting at Johns Hopkins University in Washington D.C. around the theme of Islam and Democracy.³⁴ Subsequently the Abant Platform has also met in Europe and has planning for an ongoing series of international meetings.

When compared with Islamic movements across the Muslim world the Gülen movement, or *hizmet*, is without equal with the possible exception of Indonesian organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, but on certain fronts, media in particular, even these much larger institutions are not a match for the Gülen *hizmet*.

Leaving aside the Gülen movement's unmatched endeavours in the realm of modern media, in many respects the closest parallels to the *hizmet* are found not in the civil sphere of the Muslim world but rather in the western hemisphere in contemporary and early modern Christian civil society movements and organizations. The reasons for this appear to be bound up with the existence of certain social needs in modern Turkish society and the opportunities to meet them that have arisen over the past three decades. Just as importantly, however, is the fact that Fethullah Gülen and his movement share a similar philosophical approach to science and learning. The following statements from Gülen could just as easily have come from John Wesley or Jonathon Edwards or any number of Jesuit brothers:

Neglect of the intellect ... would result in a community of poor, docile mystics. Negligence of the heart or spirit, on the other hand, would result in crude rationalism devoid of any spiritual dimension ... It is only when the intellect, spirit and body are harmonized, and man is motivated towards activity in the illuminated way of the Divine message, that he can become a complete being and attain true humanity.³⁵

A person is truly human who learns and teaches and inspires others. It is difficult to regard as

32 Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) 'The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans', in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.45.

33 Ihsan Yilmaz (2005) 'State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey', *The Muslim World* Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.400.

34 Zeki Saritoprak (2005) 'An Islamic Approach to Peace and Nonviolence: A Turkish Experience', *The Muslim World* Vol. 95 no. 3 July 2005, pp.423.

35 Gülen, Fethullah (2001) *Prophet Muhammad: Aspects of His Life*, trans. Ali Unal, Fairfax, Va.: The Fountain, pp. 105-6.

fully human someone who is ignorant and has no desire to learn. It is also questionable whether a learned person who does not renew and reform oneself so as to set an example to others is fully human.³⁶

Scientific knowledge without religion usually causes atheism or agnosticism, while religious knowledge without intellectual enlightenment gives rise to bigotry. When combined, they urge a student to research, further and further research, deepening in both belief and knowledge.³⁷

As Hakan Yavuz has so acutely observed:

Gülen's conception of identity and morality are interconnected but do not form a self-contained or closed system. Morality translates into identity through conduct and collective action, so acting and engaging in the public and private spheres are part of building the moral self. In short, morality and identity must be put into practice and reinterpreted on the basis of new challenges. "Islam by conduct (hizmet and himmet) and "Islam by product (eser) are the two key concepts of the Gülen movement.

Because Islam, for Gülen, is the constitution of morality and identity, he stresses the role of education for the cultivation of the self. His education project is based on three principles: cultivation of ethics, teaching of science and self-discipline. In his faith-inspired education project, morality and discipline consist of sacrifice, responsibility to others, handwork and idealism. In fact this religiously motivated global education movement is a way of bringing God back to one's life through the ethic of self-sacrifice and hardwork. Muslims constantly are reminded that avoiding sin is not enough; rather, engaging to create a more human world is required. Salvation means not only to be "saved from" sinful activities but also to be engaged actively engaged in the improvement of the world."³⁸

Fethullah Gülen can be truly said to be 'preaching by example' and, on the front of social activism and the greater good through learning and the pursuit of knowledge, his example is one that speaks loudly not just to the Muslim world but also to the west.

36 M. Fethullah Gülen (1999) 'The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Approach', Speech given at the Parliament of the World's Religion, Capetown, 1-8 December 1999; quoted in Thomas Michel (2003) 'Fethullah Gülen as Educator' in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.79.

37 M. Fethullah Gülen (1997) *Understanding and Belief: The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, Izmir: Kaynak, p.302.

38 Yavuz, M. Hakan (2003) 'The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans', in M. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, p.26.