

THE PLACE OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT IN THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF ISLAM, PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO ISLAM'S CONFRONTATION WITH POSTMODERNISM¹

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Abstract

The world is changing at an unprecedented rate. Established religions are struggling to come to terms with societies that are increasingly secular and sceptical about the certainties of the past. They are struggling to come to terms with the new modes and speeds of communication and the moods and ideas that can now be spread so fast. How Islam will eventually respond to the post-modern world is still to be determined. Some want nothing to do with that world, others understand the need to take the opportunities and rise to the challenges. Fethullah Gülen is one of the latter.

This paper places the Gülen movement and Fethullah Gülen himself in particular, within the context of Islam's confrontation with modernity and post-modernity. It demonstrates Gülen's awareness of Islam's intellectual legacy and the extent to which he utilises the methodologies of earlier scholars. Gülen interprets Islam's foundational texts in a way that picks out their relevance to today's world. He is unafraid to engage with other philosophies and faith communities. The schools established by his followers have developed curricula designed to produce the next generation of leaders. Gülen envisions a world where people are deeply grounded in a moral and ethical tradition, where humility and service are highly valued and where reason, science and technology are fully utilised for the benefit of all. This paper shows that when confronted by the uncertainties and relativities of postmodernism, Gülen has located a middle way able to sustain itself in a globalised, postmodern world while remaining true to its Islamic heritage.

¹ This paper began life as a graduate essay entitled, it seems that Islam has the resources to develop and come to terms with modernity / post-modernity, on its own terms, if only it is allowed to. Discuss. My sincere thanks to Dr. Jennifer Herrick and Suzanne Dooley for encouraging me to develop the essay further.

Introduction

The events of September 11, 2001 changed the world in many ways, but equally, those events confirmed and reinforced many prejudices. They vindicated those commentators, journalists, theologians and politicians who believe there is a fundamental divide between the West and Islam. For those people, the collapse of the New York Twin Towers gave the lie to the postmodern view that all beliefs are equally valid and that there are no objective truths. September 11 took many people in the West back half a century to the ideals of modernity where the West knew that they had the mortgage on objective truth and morality. It can be argued that, the same events had the same effect on many Muslims. The response of the West confirmed all the anti-Western rhetoric of the extreme elements among Muslims. September 11 has changed the landscape and almost inevitably becomes part of the context for any discussion of Islam's relationship with the West since that time. With this in mind this paper will discuss Islam's confrontation with the postmodern world and the place of the Gülen Movement in coming to terms with that world. It will discuss what is meant by the Gülen Movement, Islam, modernity and postmodernity. It will briefly discuss the intellectual history of Islam with emphasis on the role of *ijtihad* (the use of reason in Qur'anic interpretation) in both historical and contemporary Islam and it will situate Fethullah Gülen within that history. It will look at the challenges facing contemporary Muslim intellectuals and argue the Gülen Movement is ideally placed to be part of meeting these challenges.

The Gülen Movement

M Fethullah Gülen was born in Erzurum, Eastern Turkey, in 1941 where he received a classical education. Following exposure to the writings of Said Nursi, Gülen became committed to an educational philosophy which sought to combine theological, spiritual and scientific knowledge. He became concerned that in a strongly secular, state education system, Turkish youth were losing touch with their Islamic heritage. Beginning with holiday camps, Gülen and those who were attracted to his ideas sought ways to provide an Islamic education which would compliment the secular education that the state was providing. The holiday camps led to community houses and dormitories for student teachers of religion and secondary school students. The journal *Sızıntı* was established to promote the synthesis of scientific knowledge and Islam. As a movement grew up around him, Gülen's educational philosophy moved away from its Nurcu roots. "His main goal [at this time] was to raise a new Turkish elite with an Islamic and modern orientation to lead the country." (Agai, 2002, p33) Following the 1980 coup in Turkey, his followers began to establish elite secular schools, staffed by religiously motivated teachers. Subsequently, schools were established beyond Turkey's borders throughout Central Asia and in the West. Through these schools, Gülen now seeks to build a world wide, 'Golden Generation' characterised by faith, love, idealism and selflessness. (Agai, 2002, p36)

The movement which developed around Gülen and his teachings has grown from its beginnings in the establishment of schools, to include involvement in a wide range of activities. Ihsan Yilmaz (Yilmaz, 2005, p203-4) describes the extent of this movement. Fethullah Gülen's followers, (the Gülen Movement), control a television network, two radio channels, a daily newspaper with a Turkish circulation of 300,000, which is also published in 16 countries and is available on-line, a news agency, a number of specialized periodicals, an Islamic bank and an insurance company. Schools have been established in over 50 countries and there are six universities in Turkey and Central Asia. Gülen's thoughts, sermons, speeches

and Qur'anic interpretations are widely disseminated through the media networks established and owned by members of his movement. Gülen has encouraged his followers to become involved in subjects as diverse as “genetic engineering, organ transplantation, music, art, modern theology, Qur'anic exegesis, Muslim-Christian dialogue and secularism.” (Yilmaz, 2005, p203-4) Enes Ergene sums up the Gülen Movement thus:

The Gülen movement is a rare development that brings the social and cultural components of the Islamic tradition face-to-face with modern values and encourages engagement in a positive interaction. It has produced a wide process of dialogue in educational, religious, and social arenas, throughout regions with different cultures and civilizations. ... [Gülen] leaves all ideological concerns aside and proposes a model that is based on man being the basic element of all ideologies. The man or woman in this model is an altruistic person who has been created by God to inherit this world, who can put aside all his personal needs and desires in the name of divine love—love for mankind and all of existence. As a result, this person can be put at the basis of all sorts of interaction, societies and leadership. (Ergene, 2006, p7-8)

The influence of Fethullah Gülen rests on two pillars, the breadth of his thinking and vision, and the size of his constituency (numbered in the millions in over a hundred countries). It is arguable that few if any other moderate, contemporary Muslims have access to as many educational and media opportunities and outlets for the dissemination of their ideas as Fethullah Gülen.

Nature of Islam

Is Islam a religion, a culture or a civilization? Certainly, most non-Muslims, particularly in the West, would regard Islam as a religion. Muslims worship a God, pray and have a book of Holy Scriptures. However, Islam is clearly much more than a religion. In “A Statement by the Islamic Council of Europe, 1976” the authors write, “Islam is not a religion in the Western understanding of the word. It is a faith and a way of life, a religion and a social order, a doctrine and a code of conduct, a set of values and principles and a social movement to realize them in history.” (Beckerlegge, 2001, p188) Azyamardi Azra, in discussing the breadth of cultural Islam, identifies “at least eight cultural realms among Muslims”. He lists these as, Arab, Persian, Turkic, Sudanic (Black Africa), the Indian Sub-continent, Malay-Indonesian, Sino-Islamic, and the Western hemisphere. (Azra, 2006, p230) Ahmet Karamustafa describes Islam as

...a sprawling civilisational edifice under continuous construction and renovation in accordance with multiple blueprints (these are the numerous Islamic cultures at local, regional and national levels encompassing innumerable individual, familial, ethnic, racial and gender identities) all generated from a nucleus of key ideas and practices ultimately linked to the historical legacy of the Prophet Muhammad. It is vital to realize that nothing about this edifice is ever fixed or frozen in either space or time and that the construction itself is in constant flux. (Karamustafa, 2003, p108)

This is a broad, but nevertheless, comprehensive definition.

It is clear that Islam is unable to be placed easily into a neat pigeon-hole for convenient study. Ziauddin Sardar has pointed out that studying the various aspects of Islam in isolation is useful, but restrictive. The various aspects of Islamic life “are [regularly] treated ... as though they had no real bearing on the others.” (Sardar, 2003a, p35-47) Yet each aspect of life **does** have a bearing on the others. For example, unlike most Western countries, in Islam there is little or no distinction between culture and law, a law which finds its source in religion. (Hussain, 2004, p28)

Gülen acknowledges this problem in defining Islam:

On the one hand, religion is an inwardly experienced and felt phenomenon, one that, for the most part, is related to the permanent aspects of life. On the other hand, believers can see their religion as a philosophy, a set of rational principles, or mere mysticism. The difficulty increases in the case of Islam, for some Muslims and policy-makers consider and present it as a purely political, socio-logical, and economic ideology, rather than as a religion. (Gülen, 2004, p 219)

Confining Islam to a convenient definition is therefore a problem. This paper will agree with Karamustafa and accept that Islam consists of a diverse group of people who acknowledge “a nucleus of key ideas and practices ultimately linked to the historical legacy of the Prophet Muhammad.”

Modernity

Defining modernity and postmodernity is an exercise described as impossible by a great many writers who then proceed to offer their own idiosyncratic definitions. Clinton Bennett, rather than attempting to define modernity, briefly discusses its history as an intellectual movement from Spinoza in the seventeenth century to today. He describes a number of characteristics which he says are representative of this movement. (Bennet, 2005, p24f)

- i. With the discovery of the laws of physics and the development of the theory of evolution, God was no longer needed as an explanation for the created world.
- ii. With the rise of reason, morality could be based on social values rather than on a divine law-maker.
- iii. Freed from the legalistic restrictions of God, people could fully utilize their reason and become fully autonomous.
- iv. Utilizing science and reason, knowledge could be discovered and continually extended, rather than be confined to the Bible, or in the context of this paper, the Qur'an.
- v. Science and reason were the final arbiters of truth.
- vi. Religion was marginalized and tolerated provided it was an activity confined to the privacy of ones own home or church.

This elevation of reason above religion to the point where religion was no longer needed was not a conclusion to which Islamic philosophers were drawn. Leaman argues that rather than finding that rational argument resulted in conclusions contrary to their faith, Islamic philosophers used reason and rational argument to defend their faith and to attack opposing positions. (Leaman, 1999, p14) The rejection of religion in favour of reason and science is a Western response and resulted in an implication among Western rationalists, that other civilizations were somehow not as intellectually advanced and therefore inferior. This implied superiority of the West became a justification for many of the excesses resulting from European expansion and imperialism.² Thus, as Gülen has pointed out “modernity in ideological terms [is] perceived by people coming from different cultures and civilizations as connoting past conflicts and unsettled scores.” (Gülen, 2004, pvi)

The separation of religion and science, the reliance on humanity rather than on God, the trust in reason rather than revelation, all of which are characteristic of modernity, have been attacked by many non-Western writers. Enes Ergene for example writes,

² The taking of slaves from Africa and genocide in the Americas and Australia are but two examples of such excesses.

There is no denying that modernity has encouraged man's innate egotism. It has seduced him into a position of such overweening confidence that he can no longer properly appreciate the deep truths of life. (Ergene, 2006 p4)

For Gülen, this separation of science and religion is artificial:

...there can be no conflict [he writes] among the Qur'an, the Divine Scripture, (coming from God's Attribute of Speech), the universe (coming from His Attributes of Power and Will), and the sciences that examine them. (Gülen 2004, p 196)

Gülen's view coincides with that of the philosopher Oliver Leaman, who argues that the logical conclusion for a theistic religion like Islam, of separating science and religion, is to regard science as equal to, if not higher than religion. In a world brought into existence by God and whose constitution is formed by God, nothing can be completely independent of religion. (Leaman, 1999, p53) Nevertheless, Gülen has suggested that many Muslims have been seduced by the attractions of Western modernity. He believes

...metaphysical thought and spirituality have been discarded almost entirely by many Muslim intellectuals. In the name of certain notions reduced to such simplistic slogans as *enlightenment*, *Westernization*, *civilization*, *modernity*, and *progress*, metaphysical thought and spiritual life have been denigrated and degraded. Such slogans also have been used to batter traditional Islamic values." (Gülen in Ünal and Williams, 2000, p355)

Such criticism of modernity notwithstanding, the belief in the validity of science over religion allowed Western colonialism and triumphalism to flourish into the latter half of the twentieth century.

Postmodernism³

By the mid 1960s, the social analyst Peter Drucker was arguing that at "some unmarked point during the last twenty years we imperceptibly moved out of the Modern Age", and even at that stage, Drucker was beginning to speak of a "postmodern world". (Drucker in Voll, 2003, p239) A sense was developing that this belief in the power of the social narrative that was represented by Science and Reason, had outlived its usefulness. According to the postmodernists, in the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century there are no longer any great truths. Everything is relative.

Postmodernism a very slippery term and it is much easier to describe than define. Akbar Ahmed describes a number of characteristics of postmodernity. The five characteristics which are most relevant to the present discussion are:

- i. Postmodernity assumes a 'questioning, or a loss of faith in, the project of modernity'. It embraces pluralism, rejects previously accepted orthodoxies, 'a view of the world as a universal totality' and the possibility of 'final solutions and complete answers'. In this view, Islam, like any other ideology, is but one option among many alternatives.
- ii. Ethno-religious revivalism or fundamentalism' feeds on postmodernity... since 'Where nothing is sacred, every belief becomes revisable'.

3 It should be noted that though the existence of a phenomenon called 'postmodernism' is recognised by many writers, there is not unanimous agreement as to what it is, or even whether it exists. Nicholas Fearn for example derides Derrida and his ilk by suggesting that "[p]ostmodernism appeals to thinkers who respect ideas more for their aesthetic qualities than their veracity." (Fearn, 2005, p143)

- iii. An intricate connection between postmodernity and the role of the media as the ‘central dynamic’ of the present age.
- iv. The postmodern project is driven by those who have access to the media and to means of communication – an educated elite.
- v. Postmodernism celebrates and encourages hybridity, the mixing and mingling of styles and ideas.⁴ (Bennet, 2005, p33ff)

Ahmed is equivocal about the postmodern world, for “therein lies the Muslim predicament: that of living by Islam in an age which is increasingly secular, cynical, irreverent, fragmented, materialistic and, therefore, for a Muslim, often hostile.” (Forward, 1998, p139) At one level he sees its cynicism as a threat, but he also acknowledges its tolerance of diversity. He retains however, a respectful caution about the West’s capacity to put its behaviour where its verbal espousal of tolerance is. Similarly, Ziauddin Sardar, has described the task of remaining true to the values of Islam while confronting the challenges of postmodernity, as a “mega-task”, that will “necessarily lead to considerable strife and conflict”, but which, he believes, will eventually result in “a saner, safer society.” (Sardar (b), 2003, p121-126)

The Christian theologian Kevin Vanhoozer, writing on postmodernism, refers to the “loss of faith in ... grand narratives”, the denial of universal rationality and reason, and suspicion of claims to the truth. There is, he writes, an “[incredulity] towards narratives that purport to recount universal history” and a rejection of the “notion that the self is an autonomous individual with a rational consciousness”. (Vanhoozer, 2003, p12) He continues,

[p]ostmodern incredulity thus undoes H. Richard Niebuhr’s three stranded cord: ‘To be a self is to have a God, to have a God is to have a history, that is, events connected in a meaningful pattern; to have one God is to have one history.’ In this respect, postmodernists agree with Nietzsche that ‘God’ – which is to say, the supreme being of classical theism – has become unbelievable, as have the autonomous self and the meaning of history. (Vanhoozer, 2003, p12)

This clearly presents a challenge to any religion or civilization which finds its identity in its history and relationship to God.

For Fethullah Gülen and other Muslims, there **is** a grand narrative that gives meaning to life. Gülen, writing of the Qur’an, describes it as “the strongest and immutable source of religious rules and pillars.” (Gülen, 2006) Elsewhere he writes, “Islam, is the religion of the whole universe. That is, the entire universe obeys the laws laid down by God; everything in the universe is ‘Muslim’ and obeys God by submitting to His laws.” (Gülen, 2004, p223) In similar vein, Tariq Ramadan writes of a fundamental body of principles that point humanity towards the divine will:

This corpus of principles ... is a fundamental given of the Islamic universe of reference, which asserts, in the midst of postmodernism, that all is not relative, that there does indeed exist a universal, for it is a God, an only God, who has revealed timeless principles, which, while not preventing reason from being active and creative, protect it from getting bogged down in the contradictions and incoherencies of the absolute relativity of everything. (Ramadan, 2004, p32)

Gülen and Ramadan are affirming their belief in the unity of their Islamic faith, a faith that is not merely *a* truth, but *the* truth. It would seem on the surface therefore, that there is a fundamental incompatibility between postmodern scepticism and relativity, and Islam. Given the breadth that is Islam, it is not surprising that Muslims are meeting the challenge of

⁴ Ahmed also suggests that another characteristic of postmodernism is that while postmodernity sees itself as ‘accessible’, its language is often paradoxical and enigmatic, thus compounding the difficulties of definition.

postmodernity in a variety of ways.

Meeting the Challenge of Postmodernity

Islam has a number of resources available in its endeavour to meet this challenge.

- i. There is its history of innovative and radical interpretation of its foundational texts or *ijtihad*. Many contemporary scholars including Gülen are prepared to critically examine the classical commentaries on Islam's foundational texts and are revisiting those texts in the context of contemporary problems.⁵
- ii. There are an increasing number of contemporary Islamic intellectuals who are challenging traditional understandings of Islam.⁶ Dialogue with faith groups outside of Islam is increasing. Gülen and others, while remaining true to their own faith, are nevertheless increasingly looking beyond Islamic tradition and are prepared to accept that Islam is not the sole repository of wisdom.
- iii. There is the media, television, and the internet, which provide a capacity to disseminate ideas and promote discussion in a way that has not been seen previously. The internet in particular has given 'ordinary' Muslims, who may not have received theological training, access to scholarly works that enables them to undertake their own *ijtihad*.

Ijtihad

Qur'anic exegesis has a long history. Interpretation of (*ijtihad*), and commentary on (*tafsir*), the Qur'an began during the time of the Prophet Muhammad when he was called upon from time to time to explain the Qur'an. Qur'anic exegesis was subsequently carried on by the Companions. As the early Islamic community grew numerically and spread geographically, there was a continual call for further exegesis, and by the ninth century,⁷ distinct schools, legal, theological and religio-political had made their appearance in Islam. By this time it was possible to identify distinctly Sunni, Shi'i or Khariji *tafsir*. Interpretation, despite the range of approaches, tended however to be legalistic and literalistic, as these were considered to be the least error prone methodologies. As the bodies of works grew, *tafsir*, and *ijtihad*, were gradually replaced by *taqlid* (imitation). For most scholars, the gates of *ijtihad* closed during the late ninth century. (Bennet, 2005, p21)

Part of the problem was the status of the Qur'an itself. A major issue in classical Islamic discourse was the status of the Qur'anic text. There was little disagreement as to the divine origin of the text, but was it created at a point in history, or is it eternal, having always existed in the mind of God? If it is eternal, then it cannot be located at any point in history and it therefore cannot have a temporal context. It must stand alone, divine and immutable. Thus argued the *Muhaddithin*, the traditionalists. If on the other hand, the text was created at a point in history then it would be linked to the context of that history. Believers would then be able to use their God-given ability to reason, and to make decisions about how to act in other times and places. (Bennet, 2005 p95) This was the view of the *Mu'tazalites* and their followers. Their use of logical argument (reason), and rationalistic ethics became factors in the development of the methodology of Islamic philosophy. (Esposito, 2003a, p222) In the

5 For example, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Shibli Nu'mani and Muhammad Iqbal from India, and Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida and 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq from Egypt.

6 For example, Rashid Ghannoushi, Anwar Ibrahim, Fathi Osman, and Tariq Ramadan.

7 All dating in this paper uses Common Era (CE) dates.

twelfth century, Al Ghazali, despite his attacks on philosophy, did not hesitate to argue the case for reason in establishing agreed interpretations of a particular text. He believed that scholars should agree on criteria for assessing texts, “for if they do not agree on the scale by which a thing is to be measured, they will not be able to terminate disputes over its weight.” (Barlas, 2006, p247) Reason must be the servant, not the master of Qur’anic exegesis.

Just as Medieval scholars argued for the use of reason, so too in modern times, in part as a response to the rise of Western influence and the accompanying decline in Muslim power, “Muslim advocates of renewal, reform, and revival ... argued for a return to the right to exercise *ijtihad* to facilitate reinterpretation and to renew the Islamic heritage.” (Yilmaz, 2005, p192)

Muslim intellectuals such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Shibli Nu’mani and Muhammad Iqbal from India, and Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida and ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq from Egypt who have argued that modern methods of intellectual inquiry are not only compatible with Islam, but that Islam anticipated modernity. Moosa points out that “in their definition, modernity was synonymous with innovation and openness to new knowledge. ... Innovative thinking (*ijtihad*) and renewal (*tajdid*), they argued were emblematic of Muslim discourse.” (Moosa, 2003, p117)

In the twenty first century, many contemporary Islamic scholars are calling for a renewed effort to re-examine the Qur’anic texts and review which texts are indeed timeless in their application, which are related to the specific historical context in which they appeared and which are genuinely ambiguous. Abdullah Saeed refers to this group as “progressive ijtihadists”. (Saeed, 2006b, p150) Esposito describes “a diverse group of Muslim intellectuals and activists [who] have produced a growing body of literature that re-examines Islamic traditions and addresses issues of pluralism both at the theoretical and practical level.” (Esposito, 2003b, p95) For these progressive ijtihadists, continued interpretation and reinterpretation of the foundational texts is not only allowed, but necessary. Postmodernity, with its recognition of the validity of all points of view potentially provides an environment where recontextualization could legitimately take place. Nevertheless, these scholars would not claim the encouragement of postmodern pluralism as their justification for reinterpreting the Qur’an. Their justification lies in the historical precedents of Islamic interpretation. For them, the gate of *ijtihad* did not close.

Fethullah Gülen stands firmly in this intellectual tradition. In many respects a traditionalist, Gülen believes deeply in the relevance of Islam for today. He is not so much concerned to preach to the unconverted, as to provide an example of a moral and spiritual life. It is in the practical effect of his teaching on his followers, that Gülen’s employment of *ijtihad* can be best observed. It is a practical *ijtihad* that produces a transformation that takes place within the individuals of the Gülen Movement, then moves beyond the movement to the wider society. (Yilmaz, 2003, p209) Though Gülen often argues for contemporary understandings of the Qur’an, he does not always use traditional discourse in his cause. Yilmaz suggests: “By exercising *ijtihad* without flagging it as *ijtihad*, Gülen reinterprets Islamic understanding in tune with contemporary times.” (Yilmaz, 2005, p200) Yilmaz describes Gülen’s message as seeking to promote an integration of Islam and science, an acceptance that there is a relationship between reason and revelation and an acceptance of democracy. Stated briefly, Gülen’s interpretation of Islam seeks a compromise with the modern living world. In using *ijtihad* to affect this compromise, Gülen claims a precedent for employing *ijtihad* in the secular world from the Seljuqs and Ottomans. Using the results of *ijtihad*, they enacted laws and decrees

to respond to the challenges of their times. (Yilmaz, 2005, p201) Just as Muslims through the ages have sought to make Islam relevant to their time, so Fethullah Gülen seeks to make Islam relevant to our time.

Pluralism

Pluralism is fundamental to postmodernism in the sense that postmodernism sees all points of view as valid. If Islam is to come to terms with postmodernism without sacrificing its own integrity, one can argue that it must not only accept the validity of other points of view, it must be prepared to dialogue honestly and respectfully with those points of view.

Islam has a long history of respectful interaction with the world in which it moves. From the time of the *hijra* and the contact with the Jewish communities in Medina, Islam has engaged in dialogue with people and ideas outside its immediate faith boundary. Hazrat ‘Ali, the first Shi’a Imam and the first Sunni Caliph, believed that what a person said, was much more important than who said it. (Safi, 2003, p14) In the ninth century, the philosopher Al-Kindi wrote, “We should not be ashamed to acknowledge truth and assimilate it, ... even if it is brought to us by ... foreign peoples.” (Safi, 2003, p14)

The problem of innovation, borrowing and continuity in Islamic tradition has divided Muslim intellectuals from the inception of Islam. The question of “the legitimacy of borrowing knowledge and insights from the Greeks, Indians or Persians,” occasioned furious debate in the formative years of Islam. (Moosa, 2003, p112) Many scholars, such as al-Farabi, al-Baaqillani, Ibn Sina, al-Juwayni, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and others believed that knowledge was knowledge, and its provenance did not detract from its legitimacy. They followed the maxim that “foreign knowledge” was the “lost camel of the believer”. Wherever knowledge was found, the finder was deserving of it. (Moosa, 2003, p112) Likewise, scientific enquiry was for some time a contentious issue. al-Biruni, Ibn Sina and others were enthusiastically pro-science, while other scholars like al-Shafi‘i, Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Salah, argued that any knowledge which had its source outside the teachings of the Qur’an and words of the Prophet, was dangerous and corrupting. (Moosa, 2003, p112) It was a belief in the value of knowledge whatever its source, that allowed for the borrowings from Greek science which drove the explosion of scientific achievement that characterised medieval Islam. (Turner, 1995, p26) Insights from mathematicians in India, and from Jewish and Christian theologians, poets and philosophers in al-Andalusia all contributed to the glories of Medieval Islam.

The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries have produced many significant Islamic voices calling for reform. In addition to their political activities, Muhammad Iqbal argues for a religious pluralism as does Ghannoushi. Likewise, Abd al-Karim Soroush and Hasan Hanafi argue that there is no conflict between science and Islam or between reason and revelation. (Jackson, 2006) Said Nursi “stressed that having contact with the West and Christianity is not harmful to the believer but, on the contrary, may even profit him.” (Agai, 2002, p31) Omid Safi suggests that in the twenty-first century, Muslims need to be familiar, not just with the foundational texts of Islam, but with writers both inside and outside Islam, who are not afraid to engage other faiths. Along with many others he suggests, Ibn Sina, Rumi, Chomsky, the Dalai Lama, Malcolm X, and Bob Dylan as being worthy of study. (Safi, 2003, 15)

Among all these names, one must include that of Fethullah Gülen. Gülen is a pluralist. He encourages his followers to become involved in “genetic engineering, organ transplantation, music, art, modern theology, Qur’anic exegesis, Muslim-Christian dialogue and secularism.” (Yilmaz, 2005, p203-4) As an intellectual, Gülen is able to draw on a wide range of

intellectual traditions. The breadth of his reading is considerable. In the context of stressing the importance of metaphysics for example, he writes, “The whole ancient world was founded and shaped by such sacred texts as the Qur’an, the Bible, the Vedas, and the Upanishads. Denying or forgetting such anti-materialistic Western thinkers, scientists, and philosophers as Kant, Descartes, Pascal, Hegel, and Leibniz means ignoring an essential strand of Western thought.” (Gülen, 2004, p140) In the area of religion, he has met with the Pope, and with the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, and he continues to advocate dialogue with other faith communities. If pluralism is a characteristic of postmodernity, then Fethullah Gülen, is actively engaging with postmodernity.

Education

Education according to Gülen, is a key tool in the development of society. For Gülen, education is an all-encompassing lifelong process. As an educationalist, Gülen does not confine his understanding of education to one particular facet of life. A proper education includes religion. “If [a thing] is a fundamental principle of religion, then [he believes] it should be taught in education.” (Gülen, 2004, p190) But religion on its own is only part of ones education. “We contend”, he writes, “that every requirement of life should be met in schools.” (Gülen, 2004, p188)

Making correct decisions is dependent on possessing a sound mind and being capable of sound thought. Science and knowledge illuminate and develop the mind. For this reason, a mind deprived of science and knowledge cannot make the right decisions. (Gülen, 2004, p205)

He argues that we live in a ‘global village’ and that “education is the best way to serve humanity and to establish a dialogue with other civilizations.” (Gülen, 2004) p198)

In developing his educational philosophy, Gülen places heavy emphasis on those passages from the Qur’an and the Hadith that place the pursuit of knowledge as a religious duty, on an equal footing with prayer and charity. (Afsaruddin, 2005) Though a deep believer in the truth of the Qur’an and of its authority as the final arbiter in matters of morality and science, Gülen has been able to accommodate both modernity and post-modernity. While he accepts that extreme modernity and fundamentalist Islam are likely to be incompatible, there is, he believes, a middle way. Just as reason’s excess is demagogy and its deficiency is ignorance, its middle way is wisdom. (Kuru, 2003, p118) Gülen has been able to find that illusive middle way between traditional Islam and the modern, globalized scientific world. He believes that for Islam to survive, it needs to live in the Westernised, globalized world as an equal partner and player. Muslims need to be able to rise to leadership positions in industry, in politics and in the bureaucracy, and to this end, he has encouraged the development of schools which emphasise science, language skills and academic excellence. He envisages a ‘golden generation’, able to lead a personal and community life that will showcase Islam and encourage others to follow. Gülen teaches that:

Education through learning and a commendable way of life is a sublime duty that manifests the Divine Name *Rabb* (Upbringer and Sustainer). By fulfilling it, we attain the rank of true humanity and become a beneficial element of society. (Ünal and Williams, 2000, p308)

In a very real sense, the Gülen Movement’s schools are engaged in building “social capital”. (Agai, 2002, p29) In these schools Islam is not always emphasised, though there is an emphasis on the teaching of ethics “which is seen as a unifying factor between different religious, ethnic and political orientations. (Agai, 2002, p27) In many ways, Gülen’s

educational mission has been likened to that of the nineteenth century Protestant missionaries in Turkey who were often not so much concerned to preach and convert, as to live lives of service and good works, so that they might be a witness and an example to others. Elizabeth Özdalga found a belief among teachers in Gülen Movement schools

that God's will has to be worked out in silence." (Özdalga, 2003, p67) She quotes one teacher as saying, "I think that religious believers essentially are carriers of universal values. That is also perhaps the reason why parents prefer to send their children to our schools. (Özdalga, 2003, p70)

An example of one of these schools is in Melbourne, Australia. Isik College was established in 1997 by local Turkish migrants. Its website makes no reference to the Gülen Movement, but it describes the school's aims and philosophy in terms that have been taken directly from Gülen's writings. Quoting from their website:

The name of Isik College derives from the Turkish word meaning 'light' or 'illuminate'. The aim of Isik College is that our graduates will be the representatives of 'The Golden Generation', illuminating the minds and hearts of many. ...

Our strength lies in the passion and care we have towards the raising of a new generation – the adults of tomorrow. Our devotion and commitment to this duty is based on the firm belief that our students will be raised as the golden generation – the generation with the nobility of mind and spirit and who have the strength to shape the future.

The use of the expression 'golden generation' is a clear echo of Gülen's vision for the future.

At the academic level, Isik College is clearly succeeding. In 2007, 100% of the 2006 Year 12 girls at Isik College are now studying at university, as are 95% of the boys – the remaining 5% of the boys having been offered places but having deferred. These are outstanding results and were reported to be the best results of any school in the Australian state of Victoria. (*The Age*, 19 June, 2007, 4) The goal of preparing a golden generation of leaders of the future would seem to be being met at least in the academic sense.

Dar al-Cyber Islam⁸

In the thirteenth century, Europeans learned how to make paper from rags. In the fifteenth century, they learned to print using moveable type. These two innovations paved the way for the Protestant Reformation by providing ordinary people (at least those who could read) with their own copies of the Bible as well as commentaries on the sacred text. Ordinary Christians could now read the scriptures and make up their own mind as to what they believed. (MacCulloch, 2003, p71) The advent of the World Wide Web has resulted in an access to knowledge which is no less significant. As more texts are transferred into digital format, more and more people are able to access those texts and form opinions about them. Islamic legal and theological texts are no exception. Ihsan Yilmaz predicted in 2000, that it would not be long before the traditional books of the various legal schools would be available on the internet and on DVDs (Yilmaz 2000, p194). He noted that already, newspapers and journals, radio stations and television channels have their own muftis and question-answer programs. Through these media and through e-mail discussion lists, Muslims can obtain

⁸ The expression Dar al-Cyber Islam is taken from: Kort, A. (2005) Dar al-Cyber Islam: Women, Domestic Violence, and the Islamic Reformation on the World Wide Web, where she uses the expression to refer to the World of Islam as found on the World Wide Web.

answers and *fatwas* for any particular problem. (Yilmaz, 2000, p195) Bernadette Andrea has noted that “since the 1990s, in particular, Gülen’s views have been disseminated to Western, and especially English-speaking, audiences via the internet and international publishing ventures.” (Andrea, 2006, p148)

Alexis Kort examined the role of the World Wide Web in discussing the question of domestic violence perpetrated on Muslim women. She compares the potential effect of the development of the internet on Islam with the effect of the development of the printing press on sixteenth century Catholicism. The internet she argues, has already opened the gates of *ijtihad* and has brought access to scholarly discourse within reach of anyone with access to the World Wide Web. Her paper concludes:

In my exploration and analysis of websites, I did find evidence that traditional Islamic notions of *ummah*, *ulama*, and of course *ijtihad* are changing. ... While it is difficult to prove just how far reforming trends in Islam, through the Internet, will succeed in directly changing such tangible things as reactions to and prevention of domestic violence, my research and analysis does indicate that the possibility exists, in Dar al-Cyber Islam. (Kort, 2005, p380)

Gülen is aware of the potential for a postmodern plethora of different views, all claiming legitimacy. He has advocated the formation of *ijtihad* committees. He argues that it is no longer possible for individuals to be able to do justice to the huge amount of learning which would be required to be a *mujtahids* on all matters. In Gülen’s view, scholars from a wide range of disciplines will be able to come together in committees to advise on particular issues. In keeping with his commitment to scientific progress, Gülen believes that they should avail themselves of all the latest technological tools available to them, including computers, the internet, and DVD-ROMs. (Yilmaz, 2000, p202)

Dar al-Cyber Islam is a reality which reflects all the ambiguities of postmodernism. It is a world that Islam at all levels is going to have to come to terms with.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, Islam is living in a world that no longer accepts the great truths of the past. Faith communities that rely for their identity on their history and on their relationship to a God who is no longer fashionable, are being challenged to come to terms with this new, globalized, postmodern world. As part of the world wide faith community of Islam, the movement which has developed around Fethullah Gülen and his ideology is making a serious attempt to come to terms with that world.

The Gülen Movement is not new in the sense that its ideology is new. Gülen had grounded his teaching in the precedents of historical Islam. Gülen recognizes that throughout its history, individual Muslims and the movements that have developed around them, have sought to extend the boundaries of Islam’s intellectual influence and contemporary relevance. From the *Mu’tazilites* who argued for the introduction of reason into Qur’anic interpretation, to Ibn Rushd who borrowed from Aristotle, to Said Nursi, who believed that contact with Christianity may be profitable, Muslims have been prepared to move outside the square. Mediaeval Islamic mathematicians borrowed from India, and in al-Andalusia, scientists, theologians and philosophers freely exchanged ideas with their Jewish and Christian colleagues.

Fethullah Gülen stands firmly within this tradition. While remaining a theologically conservative Muslim, he believes deeply in the value of reason, science and technology. He has engaged intellectually with Western thinkers and he has personally shared his desire for

inter-religious harmony with leaders of other faiths. It is true that these things have been done before. What makes Gülen unusual is the range of activities in which his followers have become involved, the breadth of his vision, and the opportunities he has created to enable his ideology to be disseminated. Gülen envisions a world where people are deeply grounded in a moral and ethical tradition, where humility and service are highly valued and where reason, science and technology are fully utilized for the benefit of all. His use of interpretation to demonstrate the relevance of the Quran in the world today is significant to the attainment of that goal. So too is his readiness to dialogue with non-Muslim philosophies and faiths. The schools established by his followers have developed curricula which will develop adults capable of bringing his vision to fruition. The media outlets owned by his followers allow for the wider dissemination of his ideas.

At present, Gülen's influence is strongest in those Asian countries with cultural ties to Turkey, although this is changing as his movement's schools extend into other parts of Asia and the rest of the world. Gülen is not as well known in the West as he is in Asia, nevertheless, his international profile is increasing. The decision to create the Fethullah Gülen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations at the Australian Catholic University is not only an indication of his increasing profile, but a recognition of the role Gülen and his movement are playing on the world stage.

The Gülen Movement stands firmly within the intellectual history of Islam. It presents a vision, both for the future of Islam and for the world, a vision that is mindful of the vagaries and relativities of postmodernism while remaining true to its Islamic heritage.