

TOLERANCE IN THE THEOLOGY AND THOUGHT OF A. J. CONYERS AND FETHULLAH GÜLEN

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Introduction

In his book *The Long Truce: How Toleration Made the World Safe for Profit and Power*¹ the late A. J. Conyers argues that tolerance, a principle doctrine in western democracies, is not a public virtue; rather he contends that it is a political strategy employed to centralize power and guarantee profits. Tolerance, of course, seemed to be a reasonable response to the religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, but tolerance based upon indifference to all values except political power and materialism has relegated ultimate questions of meaning to private life. Conyers offers another model for tolerance based upon values and resources already resident in pre-Reformation Christianity.

In this paper, we consider aspects of Conyers' case against the modern, secular doctrine of tolerance. We examine his attempt to reclaim the practice of Christian tolerance based upon humility, hospitality and the "powerful fact" of the incarnation. Furthermore, we bring the late Conyers into dialogue with Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim scholar, prolific writer and source of inspiration for a transnational civil movement. We explore how both Conyers and Gülen interpret their scriptures and tradition in order to fashion a theology and political ideology conducive to peaceful co-existence.

In many ways Conyers is a suitable dialogue partner with Gülen on the question of tolerance.²

1 A.J. Conyers, *The Long Truce: How Toleration Made the World Safe for Profit and Power*, (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 2001).

2 My assumption for this presentation is that A. J. Conyers and his work are relatively unknown to the audience. On the other hand, the contributions of Gülen are well known to most if not all present. However, for a helpful

Until his untimely death at the age of 60, Conyers had distinguished himself as a gifted Baptist theologian with an ever-increasing audience. He was a consummate, “southern gentleman” (in the American sense of the word), kind, welcoming, sincere. As a scholar, he had benefited from a positive relationship with Jürgen Moltmann, whose influence appears consistently, though not uncritically, in his work.³ As a Baptist, Conyers was a member of a denomination in the USA that is not typically associated with tolerance but is with strong convictions, passion and fervency in faith. Still, despite popular perceptions, there is a significant tradition of tolerance and freedom of conscience within many Baptist thinkers in Europe beginning with Thomas Helwys. Baptists, of course, were a religious minority at the turn of the 17th century, and so they faced hostility from both established churches and government officials. As a result, they advocated for religious liberty initially for themselves but by extension for all. They formulated the doctrine directly from Christian Scripture, reason and human experience. Essentially, they argued that government should not meddle in matters of religion and conscience. Had they known it, they would have agreed wholeheartedly with the Qur’anic injunction that there is no compulsion in religion. Baptist leaders scandalized some by advocating religious liberty for Roman Catholics, Turks, Jews and heretics alike.⁴ Religious uniformity, they believed, was not necessary to ensure the domestic tranquility.⁵ In the last century this Baptist distinctive is articulated carefully in the work of E. Y. Mullins⁶, and Conyers carries on that tradition. Conyers then represents the most recent and articulate advocate for tolerance in American Baptist life. But Conyers also recognizes that the practice of toleration is “not an exclusively Christian predisposition, for the practice of toleration is often touchingly and effectively expressed in such religious philosophies as one finds associated with Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, and among the Sufi mystics of Islam.”⁷ This is all the more reason to bring Conyers and Gülen into conversation.

Conyers’ Critique

Since the 17th century tolerance has often been considered a public virtue. In the last decades of the 20th century tolerance/toleration became one of the principle virtues⁸, institutionalized in western democracies in a variety of ways.⁹ Conyers, however, questions whether

overview of Gülen’s life see Ali Ünal and Alphonse Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue: Fethullah Gülen* (Fairfax, VA: Fountain, 2000), 1-42.

3 E.g., A. J. Conyers, *God, Hope, and History: Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988).

4 Thomas Helwys, *The Mystery of Iniquity* (London: 1612), 69.

5 H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 85-86.

6 E. Y. Mullins, *Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of Baptist Faith* (American Baptist Publication Society: Philadelphia, 1908), 44, argues that Baptists historically have led out with the ideas of “soul liberty” and the “separation of church and state.” In addition, Mullins sees that “[t]oleration and religious liberty are the poles apart,” seeing that the “Calverts” and Roman Catholics did not go far enough in securing toleration from England, 48-49.

7 Conyers, *Truce*, 228.

8 Thomas Aquinas distinguishes the cardinal virtues, temperance, justice, prudence, and fortitude, from the theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q. lxi, aa. 2 and 4). The cardinal virtues are derived in the “subjects” or “faculties” of humans, whereas the theological virtues are “supernatural” and come from God. Recent philosophers like J. Budziszewski wish to see tolerance as a virtue, *True Tolerance* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 5.

9 Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” 1, argues that tolerance is an end in itself. Marcuse, who is a Hegelian, sees history as eventually telling the “truth.” So the end of this virtue itself is played out in “extralegal means,” i.e., violence and revolution. The irony is in how the original purpose of tolerance, namely, to assuage the problems of religious wars in earlier centuries will climax in violence. This is one of the reasons why Conyers sees the 20th century as

tolerance should be considered a virtue at all. Compared with other, classical virtues such as love, courage, and moderation, Conyers argues that tolerance is different because everyone acknowledges that there must be limits regarding toleration. When John Locke wrote famously regarding tolerance, he argued that tolerance is not limitless.¹⁰ Some are not to be tolerated, including atheists and Roman Catholics according to Locke. While we might disagree with where the line of toleration is drawn, everyone acknowledges that the line has to be drawn somewhere. When the Boniuk Institute for the Study and Advancement of Religious Toleration at Rice University held its inaugural conference in September 2005, the theme of that conference was “Tolerance and Its Limits.” In Conyers’ view, true virtue has no limits. He writes:

A virtue strengthens our relationships. From a Christian perspective, all virtues serve the interests of love, love being the chief virtue and goal of life. Humility, patience, and prudence make it possible to love God, the world, and human beings, all in their proper order and proportion. Virtues are interconnected and, in a sense, are all one. They are themselves the goal of human life. We are created for this: to be capable of loving.¹¹

For Conyers, all lesser virtues serve the chief virtue, love. There is never a time when love is out of place or courage is inappropriate or moderation is unwise. But everyone agrees that tolerance cannot be without limits.

So then, what is tolerance if it is not a virtue? Conyers proffers that tolerance is a modern strategy to establish centralized power and to protect economic prosperity. While it may depend on virtues such as humility, moderation, patience, etc, tolerance is in fact a policy to achieve a particular end. That particular end itself is a good. Tolerance aims to ease the tensions rooted in the significant differences facing a shrinking, global world; as such it is not an end but a means to an end, a strategy that seeks harmony and peace within our common life.¹² Now Conyers advocates for peaceful co-existence as a good worthy of all our efforts. But he questions whether the modern strategy of tolerance advocated in secular democracies has a sufficient basis. He bases his argument upon an analysis of key writers on tolerance including Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Bayle, John Locke and others.¹³

Conyers begins his critique of the modern doctrine of tolerance by noting that its genesis in the thought of John Locke and John Stuart Mill arose along with the establishment of the modern nation-states.¹⁴ Prior to that time, human societies had been composed of a variety of “natural” associations based on ethnic, religious, familial, and economic ties. These groups have their own purpose, authority structure, and internal discipline.¹⁵ With the rise of the

being the most violent. See his *The Listening Heart: Vocation and the Crisis of Modern Culture* (Spence, 2001).

10 John Locke would not extend toleration to the Roman Catholic church and atheists, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, trans. William Pope (1689). He gives reason that the former “deliver themselves up to the protection and the service of another prince,” i.e. the Pope, and the latter are not motivated to hold to “promises, covenants, and oaths.”

11 Conyers, *Truce*, 7-8.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 66-168.

14 Conyers defines the nation-state as “political entities taking in large territories and uniting peoples heretofore politically unrelated,” *Truce*, 5,

15 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1995), 147, thinks that there is inevitable tension that exists between the natural associations and the organized state. Governments and organizations may collapse but natural associations (family, friends, religious communities) tend to continue. Natural associations may be disrupted for a time but they generally survive. For that reason natural associations are ultimately more influential.

nation-states, however, the influence of the natural associations is diminished in favor of more centralized authority. As this transpires, there is a concomitant development: a growing isolation of the individual. In the pre-modern period identity had been constructed in relation to a group. Now with the authority and the influence of the group eclipsed by the larger, more powerful state, identity is confused. Rather than necessary and generative to the life of a person, these associations are construed as voluntary and accidental. According to Conyers, “the result was a powerful state and a lonely individual, two distinctive features of the modern period”¹⁶.

While we tend to think of the world today almost exclusively in terms of large, diverse nation-states, this rather recent phenomenon brought with it significant changes to social, political and religious life. In the modern nation-state the centralization of the government depends largely on the secularization of public life. As Michael Walzer has argued, in order to establish peace differences must be managed.¹⁷ Generally, they are managed by a single, dominant group that organizes public life in such a way as to reflect and maintain its own culture. Unmanaged differences will inevitably “disturb the peace.” Differences, especially religious differences with their ultimate claims, must be managed above all. So, there are three options: (1) insist that all have the same religion; (2) forbid religion from entering the public square; or (3) consign religion to the private sphere. Generally, it is options 2 and 3 that have characterized western democracies. In France and Turkey, for example, the practice of laicism has effectively excluded religion from public life. In the United States and other western democracies, freedom of religion may be guaranteed but ample social and legal strictures are present to consign religion effectively to the margins.

No doubt the religious wars that devastated Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries played a significant role in how modern philosophers and statesmen constructed their views of tolerance.¹⁸ But Conyers points out that the expansion of territories, the rise of powerful nation-states, and the growth of trade with its promises of wealth made Europe ripe for conflict without the stresses caused by religious differences. Clearly, religion was not the only factor leading to the horrors of the Thirty Years War, but it was partly to blame. Modern philosophies see the dangers of religion and therefore remove it as a viable strategy for dealing with differences.

Conyers believes the modern doctrine of toleration has failed and will continue to fail because it bifurcates life into public and private spheres and assigns questions of ultimate concern a role only on the margins.¹⁹ While the modern doctrine of tolerance pretends initially to support the idea of religion, it almost immediately will neutralize any sincere expression of religious conviction. With the one hand the tolerant democracy gives — and it can afford to give because it is a powerful, prosperous state — with the other it takes away. The wedding of tolerance with power will ultimately mean that toleration will give way to other kinds of intolerance.²⁰

16 Conyers, *Truce*, 6.

17 Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 25.

18 Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 1795, Constitution Society, <http://www.constitution.org/kant/perpeace.htm>, sees that the peace that exists between people is not “the natural state (*status naturalis*),” but he argues that “the natural state is one of war.” Therefore, in order for peace to exist a pledge is required for people who exist together, which can only take place in “a civil state.”

19 Conyers, “Rescuing Tolerance,” 43-44, recognizes that the privatization of religion was intended not only to protect the state, but religious life as well. But this resulted in the assumption that public life belonged ultimately to the state.

20 Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance” in *A Critique of Pure Toleration*, ed by Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington

Reclaiming the Practice of Tolerance

Since the modern project of tolerance will likely fail, Conyers suggests that we must seek to reclaim the ancient practice of tolerance in order to meet the growing tensions apparent in our shrinking, global world. For those who are open to religion,²¹ the practice of “high tolerance” or “authentic tolerance”, as he refers to it, is natural inasmuch as it deals with ultimate questions of meaning and purpose. The modern strategy of tolerance, however, merely postpones those questions in order to privilege other, more manageable questions. But, according to Conyers, authentic tolerance must first be disentangled from the “questionable alliance with power and will to power . . .”²²

Conyers asks: Is there a practice of tolerance not based on indifference to the question of “the good”? Is there an authentic tolerance that does not privilege power and materialism over deeper, more abiding questions? Yes, he argues, and the answer is found in the central mystery of the incarnation.²³ For Conyers “the powerful fact of the incarnation” provides a basis sufficient to reorder human existence and establish peace amidst difference.²⁴ Conyers is quick to point out, however, that he is not talking about “the doctrine of the incarnation”; for it is in the nature of doctrines to develop over time and doctrines may or may not be true. Rather he is speaking of the central conviction that God had become flesh in the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth and that He was in Christ to reconcile the world.²⁵

As a “fact” or “conviction” rather than a doctrine, it is not necessary that we grasp the reality of the incarnation or can explain it in some systematic fashion. It is more important, according to Conyers, that the reality grasps us and reorients our lives essentially toward a more tolerant and open attitude toward others who share the same enfleshed existence. Incarnation then becomes the basis for hope. A life shaped by the vigorous conviction of the incarnation may well be aware that the world is filled with suffering (because of intolerance and other problems), but it also recognizes that it is not destined for suffering nor is it beyond hope. If God has entered our world and dwelt among us, then our world must be good and our future hopeful. This stands in stark contrast to the modern notion that the world is to be feared, subdued and made safe for power and profit.

If the fact of the incarnation provides hope, then the purpose of the incarnation provides reconciliation. Initially, that means reconciliation between God and humanity; but it also means reconciliation between people for whom differences have proven hard and often insurmountable problems. Reconciliation in practice manifests itself in tolerance and openness to “the other”.²⁶ Conyers argues that the Church is “the natural culture” for reclaiming an authentic practice of toleration despite the impulses that have led some to legitimate violence through religion. If God was in Christ reconciling the world (2 Cor 5:16), then the reconciliation of all things (*ta panta*) becomes the *raison d’être* of the Church. Ultimately, the incarnation means that all things are interrelated. Therefore, all things must matter to God. And all

Moore, Jr., and Herbert Marcuse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 95-137.

21 For Conyers tolerance is a theological question. Modernity has worked hard to close the door on the transcendent nature of tolerance. Ultimately, understanding tolerance is for all insofar as any discussion about tolerance is a religious discussion.

22 Conyers, *Truce*, 229.

23 *Ibid.*, 231.

24 *Ibid.*, 232.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, 241.

things must include all people. In Christ, God loved the world. We are part of that world and so is “the other”.²⁷

The incarnation also reveals something hitherto unknown regarding God and humanity. In Christ’s self-emptying and death on the cross (Phil 2:5-11), his followers see a “lordly example” of humility and are called to imitate it.²⁸ Therefore, according to Conyers, the practice of the incarnation is first of all the practice of humility that manifests itself in listening to others. This does not mean listening for the sake of gaining advantage or seeking information; this is listening expectantly, waiting to hear the truth.²⁹ Conyers surveys the biblical evidence for toleration and defines it as: “a willingness to hear other traditions and learn from them”.³⁰ Indeed the fundamental virtue necessary for tolerance to exist and flourish is humility. This kind of authentic tolerance reflects a depth to humility that is willing to set aside the self to attend to the voice of “the other.” Humility, then, for Conyers is what makes dialogue possible. Dialogue birthed in authentic tolerance is not content to dwell on similarities, agreements and surface issues; it begins with commonalities but does not stop until it has engaged the most cherished and deeply held convictions of a group, even when those convictions differ considerably from people to people. And this kind of dialogue stands in sharp relief to the pseudo-toleration that makes “dialogue possible only so long as it conforms to certain ‘rules’ that preordain its result”.³¹ Conyers remarks:

Just as pseudo-toleration answers power with power, it answers bigotry with bigotry. The hallmark of authentic tolerant practice should be the listening heart for which the wise king prayed and not the management of language and appointing itself the arbiter of all public discussions.³²

Elsewhere Conyers refers to this tolerant disposition toward “the other” as *the practice of the open soul*. He writes:

Such toleration reaches outward toward an ecumenical goal, with eternity as its ultimate horizon, because its practice is essentially the practice of the open soul. It springs not from the fear and self-protection that Thomas Hobbes was so sure animated all things in human society where life is naturally “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short,” but it springs from a propensity toward magnanimity and a predisposition toward faith. The recovery of this *practice of toleration* would mark the reversal of a very old prejudice in the modern mind. It would reverse the deep-seated suspicion that undergirds much of modern thought, the suspicion that the world cannot be known, much less loved, and that it must be conquered in order to be made safe.³³

The practice of the open soul is essentially the practice of hospitality. It involves “welcoming the stranger” and serving his/her physical, social and spiritual needs. In any cross-cultural exchange both parties are strangers, aliens to the other. So hospitality involves not only giving but also receiving in a way that gives dignity and honor to the other. As Amy Oden has written: “Acts of inclusion and respect, however small, can powerfully reframe social rela-

27 Ibid., 234.

28 L. W. Hurtado, “Jesus as Lordly Example in Philippians 2:5-11,” in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare*, ed Peter Richardson and John C. Hurd (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 113-126.

29 Conyers, *Truce*, 233.

30 Ibid., 33.

31 Ibid., 244.

32 Ibid., Often translations of 1 Kings 3:9 indicate that Solomon prays for “wisdom,” but the Hebrew phrase means literally “listening heart.”

33 Ibid., 245.

tions and engender welcome.”³⁴

It is important to note that Conyers considers “high tolerance,” as he refers to it, a recovery or reclaiming of what the Church practiced in earlier days. He finds significant evidence that Christian believers in earlier centuries did exercise tolerance and openness, though not universally. He notes in particular the writings of Justin Martyr (d. 165), Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) and Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274). Justin, he notes, associated the *Logos* of Greek philosophy with the Christ and made possible a link from the earliest, pre-Christian philosophers to Christian theology. Similarly, Clement incorporated the best of Greek literature and philosophy into his own writings.³⁵ According to Conyers, Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* — one of the greatest achievements in Christian thought and history — “would never have seen the light of day but for a strong sentiment for a certain openness toward thinkers from other faiths and other philosophies.”³⁶ In particular on the question of “truth” (*Summa Theologiae*, XVI “On Truth”) Aquinas draws from Christian, Jewish, Muslim and “pagan” teachers. But Aquinas does not draw on these thinkers in any sort of modern way. Conyers remarks:

What are we to make of this unpretentious move by Saint Thomas, in a work of Christian theology, from the church fathers, to medieval Christians, to a Muslim, to a pagan? There is no self-conscious celebration of diversity here, not even the thought of it. Nor is there the resigned air of “everyone is entitled to one’s own opinion, since no one can gainsay opinion.” Just the opposite is the case, in fact, because there is the resolute pressing forward to an idea of truth that is common to everyone simply because it is *real* for everyone. It is inclusive not in the easy modern way that makes its claim before any effort has been expended to find common ground but in the more arduous medieval way.³⁷

Conyers, of course, is not alone in this assessment. David Burrell suggests that the doctrine of God inherited by the enlightened west was already an achievement of interfaith dialogue.³⁸

Conyers and Gülen

Although A. J. Conyers and F. Gülen were shaped in different worlds culturally and religiously — and I find no evidence that one influenced the other — amazing resonance exists between them on this issue of tolerance. This resonance is located precisely in the vitality of their respective faiths. For both men, their deep religious commitment informs their unwavering commitment to tolerance.³⁹ Still, there are subtle differences between them based in large part upon the faith communities and worlds from which they come.

First, it must be acknowledged that both Gülen and Conyers are working from a similar definition of toleration. Gülen defines tolerance as embracing all people regardless of differences

34 Amy G. Oden, ed. *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 14. See also Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

35 Conyers, *Truce*, 34-36.

36 A. J. Conyers, “Rescuing Tolerance,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life*, 115 (Aug/Sep 2001): 43-46.

37 Conyers, *Truce*, 233.

38 David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), ix.

39 On the paradox of commitment and tolerance in Gülen, see Lester R. Kurtz, “Gülen’s Paradox: Combining Commitment and Tolerance,” *The Muslim World* 95.3 (July 2005), 373-384.

and having the ability to put up with matters we personally dislike by drawing upon the strength of convictions, conscience, faith and a generous heart.⁴⁰ One of the key concepts Gülen uses in discussions of tolerance is *hoshgoru* (*hosh* = good, pleasant; *goru* = view). Sometimes this word is translated into English as “tolerance” but conceptually it is probably best taken as empathetic acceptance. For Gülen, tolerance involves identifying with and accepting others. But one cannot identify with others without first listening to them and understanding the world from which they come. Conyers would agree with this construal of tolerance and go on to say that difference is what makes “high tolerance” possible. Unlike some moderns who may wish to eliminate differences and seek to assimilate minority groups into the powerful state, Gülen and Conyers argue that embracing differences ultimately serves the same goal and demonstrates respect for those who otherwise would be left out.⁴¹ Furthermore, both Gülen and Conyers locate the resources necessary to create an atmosphere of tolerance precisely in the particularity of each faith community. For Gülen, the essence of Islam — like the word “Islam”— involves surrender [to God], peace, contentment and security. He cites a well-known episode from the life of the Prophet. When asked what practice of the faith is most beneficial, Muhammad remarks that feeding the hungry and offering *salaam* (the greeting of peace) to both friend and stranger are the most beneficial.⁴² Essentially, the pursuit of peace and seeking to establish peace are fundamental to Islam. If “peace is better” as the Qur’an teaches (4:128), then the true Muslim will work toward peace. Likewise, Conyers argues from a Christian perspective that the pursuit of peace via authentic tolerance is implicitly theological.⁴³ If the modern project of tolerance sets aside faith and ultimate questions about humanity, the world and God because these questions cannot be easily resolved, then authentic tolerance deals precisely with these questions and embraces those who answer the questions differently.⁴⁴ The pursuit of peace is therefore an essential call for any Christ-follower as it is for any Muslim.

For Gülen, tolerance is ultimately rooted in the attributes of God. God is All-forgiving, All-merciful, All-compassion. These attributes of God, while common to the teaching of all the messengers of the past, have been communicated most effectively through the Qur’an and the Sunna. In particular, the Qur’an calls all Muslims to engage in tolerance and forgiveness because of the nature of God (64:14). Although a true believer may defend himself from attack, God does not forbid showing kindness and acting justly to those non-Muslims who are willing to live in peace (60:8). True believers are called to forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of God (45:14). Likewise, they are to swallow their anger and forgive others when they have been harmed (3:134). Gülen cites these passages, along with many others, to show that the Qur’an is itself is “the source of leniency and tolerance.”⁴⁵ Additionally, Gülen relates a number of episodes from the life of the Prophet and his companions to show that he was a man of peace and demonstrated peace in his relationships with friends, enemies

40 Gülen, *Love & Tolerance*, p. 46.

41 Other words for tolerance include respect, mercy, generosity and forbearance. Tolerance is the “most essential element of moral systems.” *Ibid.*, 33.

42 *Ibid.*, 58.

43 *Ibid.*, 25.

44 Within the Christian tradition, for example, Jesus is known as “the Prince of Peace” based primarily upon the strength of an intertextual appropriation of Isa 9:6 to him. Likewise, Jesus teaches his disciples: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons of God” (Matt 5:9).

45 *Love & Tolerance*, 37-38. See the collection of Qur’anic passages cited by Gülen in Alp Aslandogan, “Interfaith Dialog and Tolerance in the Contemporary World: Fethullah Gülen,” (paper presented to the Southwest Commission on Religious Studies in Dallas, TX in March 2007).

and People of the Book.⁴⁶ The negative statements about Jews and Christians in the Qur'an, according to Gülen, are not universal injunctions. They are sourced in contingent circumstances of doctrinal controversies or active hostilities. Clearly, the Qur'an does criticize certain beliefs held by Jews and Christians (e.g., claiming God has a son and granting certain powers to the clergy). However, these critiques are leveled against ideas and attitudes not people. Furthermore, those verses that permit fighting are based on the active hostilities of particular Jewish, Christian or pagan groups against the nascent Muslim community. On the whole, according to Gülen, the Qur'an is balanced toward civilized, peaceful coexistence while preserving Muslim identity.⁴⁷

One of the strongest points of connection between Gülen and Conyers on tolerance resides in their conviction that faith in the One God reveals the interrelatedness of all things. Gülen begins with the idea that love is the reason for creation and existence, and that everything in the world is God's handiwork. Accordingly, if one does not approach all humans, who are creatures of God, with love, then one hurts those who love God and those whom God loves. Essentially, one cannot claim to love God without loving everything that God has made. Love, of course, is an essential pillar of tolerance.⁴⁸ Similarly, Conyers would agree with Gülen's teaching on love and the interrelatedness of all things. But once again, for him, the incarnation informs the discussion because it reveals God's love for all things and ultimately reconciles all things back to God. If all things are destined to be reconciled to God, then the believers' vocation in this age consists of joining God in "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:16-20).

The interrelatedness of all things leads Gülen to practice what Conyers calls in his theology the "open soul." Gülen has famously said: "Be so tolerant that our heart becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love for others. Offer a hand to those in trouble, and be concerned about everyone."⁴⁹ For Gülen faith in God and love for God's creation serve as twin pillars for a tolerance that makes one's heart as wide as the ocean. Practically, this is worked out in deeds of generosity, compassion and hospitality directed to everyone, regardless of their need. Similarly, Gülen has said: "Applaud the good for their goodness, appreciate those who have believing hearts, and be kind to believers. Approach unbelievers so gently that their envy and hatred melt away."⁵⁰ Gülen does not limit the word "believers" to Muslims, but to People of the Book (Jews and Christians) and by extension all people. He bases this upon the Qur'anic injunction that calls Muslims to accept the earlier prophets and their books (2:2-4) and to act kindly and justly toward non-Muslims as long as they are not fighting against you (60:8). But such openness must also be balanced when it comes to oppressors. Gülen warns that there are limits to tolerance and dialogue when he writes: "Being merciful to a cobra means being unjust to the people the cobra has bitten."⁵¹

The practice of "the open soul" for both Gülen and Conyers depends upon humility. Humility for Gülen means judging "your worth in the Creator's sight by how much space He occupies in your heart and your worth in people's eyes by how you treat them."⁵² We see in this statement evidence of the spiritual side of Islam, a kind of mysticism typical of the Sufi tradition.

46 Ibid., 41-44.

47 I am grateful to Dr. Alp Alsandogan for helping me understand this point of Gülen's teaching.

48 Kurtz, 375-382.

49 F. Gülen, *Pearls of Wisdom* (New Jersey: Light), 75.

50 Gülen, *Pearls*, 75.

51 Gülen, *Love & Tolerance*, 75-76.

52 Ibid., 31.

The human heart is made for its Creator and is at its best (namely, humble and generous) when the All-forgiving and All-merciful One fills every corner. Gülen privileges the spiritual sphere of Islam over the institutional and political spheres. This means that one's commitment to vitality in his/her spiritual life manifests itself in treating others with compassion, forgiveness, love and tolerance.⁵³ Such treatment will be noticed, appreciated and result in kind treatment in return.

As we saw earlier in this essay, Conyers also considers humility fundamental to any authentic practice of tolerance. But as a Christian, Conyers locates that virtue in the example of Christ and the call to "follow" him. Additionally, Conyers finds that the reality of the incarnation challenges every idea and practice of *exousia* ("power" or "authority"). In the New Testament, Jesus is clearly a prophet with authority and he shares that authority with his disciples, yet the teaching here is "not simply one of power distributed from on high but power exercised as a cosmic exchange. It is not the love of power but the power of love: God has become man, and that man, the representative of the race of men, is indeed God, so that human beings can participate in all that God is."⁵⁴ For Conyers, the coming of Christ into the world is a powerful demonstration of God's love for us, a love that ultimately exalts those who are truly humble. As the Scripture says: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas 4:6, quoting Prov 3:34).

For both Gülen and Conyers, the practice of tolerance with roots firmly planted in their respective Scriptures and traditions finds its *telos* in dialogue, what Conyers calls "the listening heart." But Gülen has been able to accomplish more than any leader or activist I know to inspire a generation of leaders who have taken the message of love, tolerance and dialogue to the nations. In particular, Gülen has urged his followers to found organizations committed to dialogue and tolerance. He has recommended that tolerance awards be given to encourage leaders from a variety of faith communities to work toward peaceful co-existence. He has warned that tolerance and dialogue will be costly ventures that changing the social landscape will take decades.⁵⁵ For Gülen interfaith dialogue involves people who are committed to their faith coming together and bearing witness to that faith for the express purpose of mutual understanding, empathy, appreciation, enrichment and cooperation.⁵⁶ Dialogue is not about proselytizing or attempting to convert others. It is not about debating the merits or various truth claims of each faith. It is not an attempt to unify all faiths or create a single, world religion. It is also not about compromising one's own faith.⁵⁷ Those who approach dialogue with hidden agendas will find the engagement frustrating, polarizing and ultimately a failure. Successes in interfaith dialogue will come slowly as sincere individuals share the stories that have shaped their lives. By learning the truth about others and their faiths, by respecting the differences that exist between all of God's creation, we find our own faiths enriched, our commitments deepened, and perhaps we will create a world where peace reigns.

53 Kurtz, 376-378.

54 Conyers, *Truce*, 238.

55 Gülen, *Love & Tolerance*, 41, 54-57. No doubt Conyers illness and premature death prevented him from realizing many of the goals he set out for himself. His work with the Christian Cultural Awareness League (C-CAL) was just beginning when he was diagnosed with cancer. The last decade of his life was spent fighting a disease that would ultimately take his life.

56 Alsandogan, "Interfaith Dialog and Tolerance in the Contemporary World: Fethullah Gülen."

57 Gülen, *Love & Tolerance*, 42.

Conclusion

While Gülen and Conyers share much in common in relation to their theology of tolerance, I find one significant difference between them. Gülen understands the crucial role that forgiveness and non-retaliation play in creating sacred spaces where tolerance can flourish. He refers to forgiveness as a great virtue that is paramount to tolerance. Forgiveness restores us and our world in ways that no other action can. To be forgiven is to be repaired. And yet one cannot seek forgiveness without forgiving others for “the road to forgiveness passes through the act of forgiving.”⁵⁸ But like tolerance, there are limits to forgiveness. To forgive “monstrous, evil” people who delight in suffering would be disrespectful to forgiveness itself. Furthermore, we have no right to forgive such people for to forgive them is to disrespect the people who have suffered so much from them. Similarly, a person committed to tolerance must also be committed to non-retaliation. According to Gülen, tolerance will manifest itself in halting verbal attacks or abuse of unbelievers. True Muslims will swallow their anger and forgive as the Qur’an teaches (3:134). Citing the Sufi leader, Yunus, Gülen encourages those who have been attacked to act as if they had no hand or tongue with which to strike back.⁵⁹ Clearly, for Gülen, forgiveness and a commitment to non-retaliation are foundational to tolerance.

I am unable to find an explicit discussion of forgiveness and non-retaliation relating to tolerance in Conyers’ writings. While I think these two commitments may be implicit in his emphasis on humility, openness and the reconciliation that comes through Christ, the fact is that Conyers does not mention them unambiguously in his attempt to reclaim the ancient practice. This, in my view, is a significant oversight that may be credited to the insulated academic and ecclesiastical environments in which many European and American theologians have worked. Gülen, on the other hand, has labored in a world where injustice and suffering are the ambient reality, where retaliation is natural, and where forgiveness is only a distant hope.

If Conyers had ever spent time with Gülen, I am confident he would have come away from those conversations enriched, with a friend and co-worker in the cause of peace. Both men are effective advocates of dialogue and tolerance precisely because of their commitment to their faiths.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 27-30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 61.

A Brief Biography of A. J. “Chip” Conyers III (29 May 1944—18 July 2004)

A. J. (Abdah Johnson) “Chip” Conyers III, Ph.D., Rev. (May 29, 1944-July, 18, 2004) was a Baptist theologian and ordained minister. He was born in San Bernardino, California. He held degrees from the University of Georgia (B.A., political science), Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Ph.D.). His dissertation topic was “Jürgen Moltmann’s Concept of History.”

In the spring of 1976, Conyers visited Notre Dame University for seminars on political theory and contemporary ideologies with Gerhart Niemeyer. He visited the Goethe Institutes in Murnau, West Germany, in 1978 and the Universität Tübingen in the same year. Jürgen Moltmann served as external examiner for his dissertation that was presented to the faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Conyers was Professor of Bible at Central Missouri State University and Chair of the department of religion at Charleston Southern University. In 1994, a seminary was started at Baylor University called George W. Truett Theological Seminary. As one of the first faculty members, Conyers was Professor of Theology at Truett Seminary and during this tenure he wrote *The Long Truce: How Toleration Made the World Safe for Profit and Power* and *The Listening Heart: Vocation and the Crisis of Modern Culture*. His last book on vocation, which was recently published on December 2006, received the “Editor’s Choice” distinction in the America Library Association’s *Booklist*. Conyers taught at Truett until his death from cancer in 2004.

Conyers was a member of First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, and is survived by his wife, Deborah; a daughter, Emily; a son, A.J. IV; and one grandson, Paul. He served on the board of many ministries including the president of the board of Christian Cultural Awareness and Assistance League (C-CAAL).