

M FETHULLAH GÜLEN'S RESPONSE TO THE "CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS" THESIS

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Abstract

Part I contains an exposition of Sam Huntington's thesis about the clash of civilisations according to Gülen. Huntington's writings are far from being realistic evaluations regarding the future. Rather, they are more like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gülen argues that by creating new enemy fronts, Huntington actually sows the seeds for a clash of civilisations on the basis of religious and cultural differences. Part II looks at Gülen's response to Huntington's thesis and has three parts: tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and compassionate love. Tolerance means closing our minds to the faults of others, respecting ideas with which we disagree, and when attacked verbally, responding with mildness or as the Qur'an says, with 'gentle words.' Interfaith dialogue involves stressing the commonalities between the world religions, rather than past polemics and historical differences. In regard to compassionate love Gülen calls the universe a symphony of compassion because without compassion everything is in chaos. Souls filled with love are in Gülen's view, the greatest heroes in the cosmos. The way of love is the way of the prophets. Part III contains my own views on the clash of civilisations. Written in the spirit of Gülen, I argue that in contradistinction to Huntington, the Muslim world is not monolithic, that many of the past wars and clashes were within the same civilisation, and that the real clash is between extremists of all types and moderates within the same culture or civilisation. I also highlight the ecumenical message of Islam, namely, that all religions deserve respect and courtesy, that followers of different religious traditions should compete with one another in piety, and that the rope that links us to God also links us to one another (Qur'an 3:103).

“The differences of opinion among the learned within my community are (a sign of God’s) grace.” (The Prophet Muhammed)

“The variety of religions belongs to the beauty and richness of the human situation because it is only the entire rainbow that provides a complete picture of the true religious dimension of Man.”(Panikkar 1999: 17).

Introduction

Like Caesar’s Gaul my essay may be conveniently divided into three distinct parts. Part I presents the thesis of Samuel P. Huntington about the clash of civilizations as found in his 1993 article, “The Clash of Civilizations?” published in the journal, *Foreign Affairs*, and then expanded and qualified in his seminal book, *The Clash Of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, published in 1996. Particular attention will be given to his remarks on the relationship between Islam and the West.

Part II contains M Fethullah’s Gülen’s response to Huntington’s now famous thesis. If Mr. Huntington is a protagonist for Western civilization, then Mr. Gülen is his counterpart, serving as a spokesperson or champion for moderate Islam. The differences between them are like night and day. Mr. Gülen argues that by creating new enemy fronts Huntington actually sows the seeds for a clash of civilizations on the basis of cultural and religious differences. Moreover, in contradistinction to Huntington, Gülen comes out strongly in favor of a rapprochement between Islam and the West based on his understanding of tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and compassionate love.

Part III consists of my own reflections on the controversy, written in the spirit of M. Fethullah Gülen. I argue that Huntington is guilty of semantic ambiguity in his use of the terms “civilization” and “culture.” I point out that neither the Western world nor the Muslim world is monolithic, that many past wars and clashes were within the same civilization, and that a dichotomy should not be made between Islam and the West. I also argue that Christianity and Islam have shaped each other, that all religions deserve courtesy and respect, and that the main problem today between Islam and the West has to do more with power rather than with religious issues.

Part I: Huntington’s Thesis

Huntington’s work on the clash of civilizations presents a paradigm or model for interpreting global politics after the Cold War, meaningful to some academics and useful to some policymakers in the West, particularly in the United States. In spite of the examples that he gives, Huntington’s thesis about a clash of civilizations derives from the internal problems of the United States. More specifically, they take their origin from Huntington’s critique of multiculturalism during the Clinton administration and the immigration of Mexicans into the United States (Halliday 2005:123). Huntington’s thesis goes like this: culture and cultural identities are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold war world. This central thesis finds further elaboration and amplification in five corollaries:

- i. For the first time in history global politics is multipolar and multicivilizational. Contacts between civilizations were either nonexistent or intermittent for most of human history. Beginning with the modern era circa 1500, the nation states of the West mainly Europe and the United States constituted a multipolar international system, interacting and fighting wars with each other within Western civilization. During the Cold War global politics became bipolar with the world divided into First World nations such as Europe and the United States, and Second World nations, namely the Communist bloc led by the Soviet Union. However, most of the conflict between these two blocs occurred among Third World nations which were for the most part poor, politically unstable, recently independent, and nonaligned (Huntington 1996: 24).

In the post-Cold War world the most important distinctions among peoples are cultural as people define themselves in terms of religion, language, history, ancestry, customs, values, and institutions. The world's eight major civilizations (Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, and Japanese), are the most significant groupings of states with nation states remaining the main actors in world affairs. Whereas in the Cold War we had the United States and its allies pitted against the Communist bloc countries, today we have a clash of civilizations. Cultural factors will spark future conflicts with the most dangerous cultural conflicts occurring among the fault lines between civilizations. Local conflicts which have the greatest probability of escalating into broader wars are those between groups and states from different cultures with power shifting from the long predominant West to non-Western civilizations (Huntington 1996: 29).

- ii. In regard to the power of the West Huntington juxtaposes two pictures. In the first picture the West has almost total dominance over other civilizations while simultaneously possessing substantial interests in every other civilization. Huntington observes that the West has the ability to affect the economics, politics, and security of every other civilization or region. In the second scenario Huntington sees the balance of power shifting with the West declining in influence and, concomitantly, Asian civilizations (Sinic, Japanese, Buddhist, and Muslim) expanding their political, military, and economic strengths.

Huntington notes that indigenization and the revival of religion are global phenomena and are most evident in the cultural assertiveness and challenges to the West that have come from Asia and from Islam. Whereas Asian assertiveness has its roots in economic growth, Muslim assertiveness arises mostly from population growth and social mobilization. In regard to the former, expansion of the fifteen to twenty-four year old age cohort in the Muslim countries provides recruits for terrorism, migration, fundamentalism, and insurgency. Population growth along with economic stagnation drives Muslim migration to Western and other non-Muslim societies, making immigration an issue in these societies (Huntington 1996: 119). Both Asians and Muslims see their culture as superior to that of the West but, interesting enough, says Huntington, other non-Western civilizations (African, Hindu, Orthodox, and Latin American) while affirming the distinctive character of their cultures, do not proclaim their superiority to Western culture (Huntington 1996: 102). Huntington does not see a bright future arguing that we will see in the beginning of the twenty-first century an ongoing resurgence of non-Western power and culture and the clash of the non-Western civilizations with those of the West (Huntington 1996: 119).

- iii. Huntington pictures the emergence of a civilization-based world order with emerging societies sharing cultural affinities cooperating with one another. The effort to shift societies from one civilization to another will not work and countries will group themselves around the core or lead states of their civilization. Huntington believes that the Muslim world has a very difficult time in terms of unity and cohesion. Islam remains fractured because competing power centers try to capitalize on Muslim identification with the *ummah* or Muslim community in order to further Islamic unity under its leadership. The difficulty comes down to this: a Muslim lead or core state must possess the military power, economic resources, organizational competence, and Islamic commitment to provide religious and political leadership to the *ummah*. Six countries (Indonesia, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) are often mentioned as candidates for a core state yet presently no one of them has all the requisites to be one (Huntington 1996:177).
- iv. Huntington argues that division and intense conflict will occur between the West and the rest, particularly in Muslim and Asian societies. A major factor in this conflict concerns the efforts of the United States to promote a universal Western culture and its declining ability to do so. The United States believes that non-Westerners should commit themselves to such Western values as democracy, human rights, individualism, and the rule of law, free markets, and limited government. Non-Western nations observe a double standard in this regard. Nonproliferation of weapons is preached for Iran and Iraq, but not for Israel. Human rights may be violated in Saudi Arabia but not in China. Democracy is promoted but not if it brings Islamic fundamentalists to power (Huntington 1996:184).
There are three main issues that divide the West and Muslim and Asian societies. First, the efforts of the West to keep its military superiority by means of policies of nonproliferation and counterproliferation in terms of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them; second, the attempt by the West to promote its own political institutions and values by pressuring other societies to respect human rights and adopt the Western view of democracy; and third, the desire of the West to protect its cultural, ethnic, and social integrity by restricting the number of non-Westerners admitted as refugees or immigrants (Huntington 1996: 186).
In the twentieth century a number of factors have escalated the conflict between Islam and the West. Muslim population growth has increased the number of the unemployed and disaffected youth, who migrate to the West or join Islamist causes. The Islamic Resurgence has given Muslims pride in their own identity and culture and values vis-à-vis the West. The Western world's efforts to make universal its institutions and values, to maintain its economic and military superiority, and to intervene in conflicts within the Islamic world, generate intense resentment among Muslims. As long as both Islam and the West refuse to change, the conflict will go on in the future as it has for the past fourteen centuries (Huntington 1996: 212).
- v. The final corollary deals with the future of civilizations. Huntington maintains that the central issue for the West is whether it can renew itself or will sustained decay (in the form of moral decline, political disunity, and cultural suicide) accelerate its demise and possible subordination to more dynamic civilizations. Huntington accuses the Clinton administration in the 1990s of rejecting the cultural heritage

of the United States by opting for multiculturalism. For Huntington the future of the West depends upon America reaffirming its commitment to Western civilization, rejecting the illusory calls to identify the United States with Asia, and both preserving and renewing the unique qualities of Western civilization (Huntington 1996: 311).

- vi. Huntington sets down three requirements for peace in order to avoid major inter-civilizational wars. First, core states must not intervene in conflicts in other civilizations. Second, core states must dialogue and negotiate with each other in order to halt fault line wars between states from other civilizations. Third, the requisites for cultural coexistence demand a stress on the factors various civilizations share. Different civilizations must learn from each other and be willing to live side by side in peaceful exchange. Clashes between civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace. The best preventative of a global war is an international order based on civilizations (Huntington 1996: 321).

Part II: M Fethullah Gülen's Response to Huntington's Thesis

Unlike Huntington Mr. Gülen is not an academic. Rather, he writes as

a preacher, a journalist, a visionary, and as an activist. His thoughts are simple yet profound, poetic rather than pedestrian. He finds his inspiration in the Qur'an, the *hadith*, the Sufi mystics, particularly Rumi the poet, and in the ideas of Said Nursi. (Valkenberg 2006: 313). Gülen was greatly influenced by Nursi and is accepting of Western modernity, defending such modern ideas as dialogue, democracy, and tolerance. Gülen's ideas on the clash of civilizations are not found in a lengthy treatise but only in a short article of about 1400 words. (Gülen 2004a: 254-257).

What does Gülen say about the clash of civilizations? Gülen does not mince words. He fears that such talk about a clash of civilizations might become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gülen notes that as a consequence of such a claim readers may form expectations in the very same way they expect an answer to prayer. By arguing that the future will involve a clash of civilizations, Huntington converts such an expectation into a purposeful goal. Gülen fears that with such a goal in mind, various policies and strategies will then be marshaled to reach and attain such a goal.

Gülen also has a different vision of the future than does Mr. Huntington. Where Huntington speaks of conflict between civilizations and variant cultures, Gülen is much more sanguine and upbeat about the future. For example, Gülen speaks to the importance of knowledge and education, which if done properly can avert any clash of civilizations. Mr. Gülen equates knowledge and power. Everything in the future will be in the orbit of knowledge.

In the first phase of his life Gülen, the visionary activist, gathered his students into a quasi-religious community which aimed to form them into a generation of pious and educated Muslims. The atmosphere in these dormitories or lighthouses was greatly influenced by Sufism, although Gülen himself was not a Sufi, strictly speaking. In these *dershanes* or learning centers of the neo-Nur movement university students prayed, developed a Muslim ethic, and discussed both social issues and the reconciliation between Islam and modern science. Gülen saw these communities as a way of building a new generation of morally superior persons. These lighthouses reminded one of the ideals of the first Muslim *ummah* or community, while they were also pointers to a better Muslim community in the future (Valkenberg 2006: 310).

Gülen believes that Islam has been neglectful of the scientific knowledge obtained during the tenth and eleventh centuries based on the Qur'an. He laments the fact that the *madrasas* or religious schools did not teach Sufism or Islam's spiritual heritage and lost interest in the experimental sciences, thus falling behind the scientific developments in Europe. Gülen feels strongly that Islam must make up for this deficiency today and in the future. He notes that our tomorrows will be constructed on the basis of knowledge since knowledge is power (Gülen 2004a: 255). In this connection Gülen is thinking of knowledge in the sense of '*ilm*' or knowledge understood as what God desires from us on earth. Gülen takes this concept from the Qur'an where the word, '*ilm*', is the second most used word in that sacred text. Unfortunately, scholars in some Muslim countries are chased out of their homes, threatened by ignorant Mullahs, or silenced so that they are unable to guide rulers and policymakers. Gülen possibly has in mind the Prophet's *hadith* that says that the death of a scholar is the death of knowledge (Ahmed 2005:109).

Gülen would like Islam to take a new approach to the sciences and develop a new way of thinking. Rather than imitating the ancient, worn-out ways educational institutions must blaze new paths. In this regard Gülen would like to see a new philosophy of life developed. The new generation should be educated at every step of the way from kindergarten to the university level in a creative way. In this connection creativity means the ability to go beyond the confines of convention (Gülen 2004d: 255).

Second, Gülen observes that Huntington's thesis on the clash of civilizations takes conflict as its fundamental presupposition. During the Cold War there was indeed a clash between two opposing power blocks, viz., the NATO countries versus the Warsaw Pact countries. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, however, a clash of civilizations based on religious and cultural differences is being prepared. The creation of these new enemy fronts lays the foundation for the rule of the power blocs in the West. These power centers in the West have put their populations on alert against a conjectured and feared enemy, namely, Islam. In this way the masses are being prepared for war (Gülen 2004d: 256).

In contradistinction to Huntington Mr. Gülen notes that no religion has ever been based on conflict. In the early centuries of Christianity war was condemned and many Christians were pacifists, e.g., Tertullian. From time immemorial Christianity did not lay down any rules regarding war until St. Augustine in the fourth century elaborated the just war theory. The Islamic religion has likewise been based on peace, world harmony, and security. The Arabic term, *jihad*, from the root j-h-d means spiritual warfare or using all one's strength, moving toward an objective with all one's power and resisting every difficulty. The primary meaning of *jihad* is this: keeping one's carnal instincts and drives under control so as to make progress in the interior or spiritual life. Only in its secondary meaning does *jihad* mean war (Juergensmeyer 2000:81). Islam believes in *jihad* as a right to self-defense only in exceptional cases, just as the human body attempts to fight against the germs that have attacked it. (Gülen 2004d: 33).

Gülen notes that Islam has always breathed goodness and peace and has considered war a secondary event. War can only take place in accordance with certain rules and principles, analogous to the criteria for the doctrine of the just war in Christianity. These principles and rules have served the purpose of limiting war, mindful of the words in the Qur'an 5:8. In short, Islam developed a line of defense so that property, life, and freedom of belief can be protected.

Terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda hijack the Qur'an for their own malevolent purposes and

are guilty not of *jihad* or a defensive war (that can only be declared by a legitimate ruler), but of *hirabah* or terrorism (Sullivan 2005: 149). Gülen states that one ought to seek Islam through its own sources and its own true representatives throughout history rather than through the actions of a small minority that distort it (Gülen 2002b:96).

Gülen's positive response to the clash of civilizations thesis consists of three parts encapsulated in the words, tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and compassionate love. The term, tolerance, appears about sixty times in Gülen's book, *Love & Tolerance*, not to mention the many times it appears in Gülen's *oeuvre* as a whole. Gülen finds the notion of tolerance and forgiveness deeply rooted in the Qur'an and *sunnah* or the customs/traditions of Muhammad (Qur'an 25:63; 25:72; 28:55). The servants of God say nothing unbecoming when they have ugly words thrown in their face. They also know how to ignore ugly or bad behavior. They take the high road bypassing negativity by acting with dignity. Gülen calls such people "heroes of tolerance." Their characteristic marks are tolerance, gentleness, and consideration for others. Gülen points out that when God sent Moses and Aaron, to the Pharaoh who claimed to be a divinity, God ordered them to speak softly and behave tolerantly (Qur'an 20:44). Muhammad, may his name be blessed, was tolerant toward Abu Sufyan, who persecuted the Prophet throughout his lifetime.

The Qur'an in 45:14 orders those whose hearts are filled with love to show tolerance and forgiveness to those who deny belief in the afterlife. Muslims are enjoined to be tolerant and forbearing toward others, expecting nothing in return. Like Yunus, the Turkish poet, true Muslims should not strike back against those who hit them. If attacked, a Muslim has the right to strike back with equal force. However, the Muslim who forgives the attacker has a higher level of faith than the one who exercises the right of self-defense. Muslims should not hold grudges against those who abuse them either (Gülen, 2000a: 258). Tolerance means we can benefit from ideas with which we disagree. Those who disagree with us, have something to give us provided we are truly open to what they say.

Gülen directs attention to the fact that if we do not forgive others, we in return have no right to expect forgiveness. All human beings are part of the same human family in the sense that we are fellow passengers on the ship called planet Earth. Gülen exhorts all of us to pull together to construct a better world built on tolerance. His optimistic and hopeful view of the future leads him to say that the twenty-first century will be called the age of tolerance. And he wants this tolerance to become permanent, that is, to last for all ages. His views about the future stand diametrically opposed to those of Mr. Huntington (Gülen 2004d: 49).

Gülen remains convinced that interfaith dialogue is sorely needed in today's world, one which is torn apart by conflict (Crane 2005:177). Dialogue for him means the coming together of two or more persons to discuss common issues. In the process of dialogue the partners form a close bond (Gülen 2004d: 50). On this score Gülen probably has in mind the Quranic word for dialogue, viz., *jidat* which means to be intimately engaged in a discussion or debate with another person (Ayoub 2007: 201).

Gülen notes that religion acts as a balm reconciling opposites: religion and revelation, this world and the next, the material world and the spiritual one. Optimally, the natural sciences ought to be steps of light leading people to God but instead have become a source of unbelief particularly in Western civilization. Islam, on the other hand, has always emphasized spirituality and spiritual matters. Since Christianity has been the religion most influenced by unbelief, Gülen envisions dialogue between Muslims and Christians as indispensable and exceedingly necessary (Gülen 2000a: 242).

Gülen argues that the very nature of religion demands a dialogue between all the major world religions. This dialogue has particular urgency for the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. There are as many reasons for Muslims and Jews to engage in interfaith dialogue as there are for Jews and Christians to come closer together. Historically speaking, the Muslim world has a solid record of dealing with the Jewish people. Jews have always been welcomed in times of troubled water, e.g., when the Ottoman Empire embraced Jews after their expulsion from Andalusia. Furthermore, Muslims were not involved in the *Shoah* or Holocaust, and Muslims have neither discriminated against them nor denied them their basic rights (Gülen 2000a: 243).

For historical reasons Muslims are and have been reluctant to enter into dialogue with Christianity. Western powers have killed more Muslims in the last century alone than all the Christians killed by Muslims in the history of the world. Today even liberal and educated Muslims feel that Western policies are designed to weaken Muslim power. Muslims wonder whether the West is continuing its thousand year systematic aggression against Islam with far more sophisticated methods than it has used in the past. No wonder Muslims are cold to the idea of entering into dialogue with Christians (Gülen 2000a: 243).

One of the main points Gülen makes repeatedly about interfaith dialogue is this: for interfaith dialogue to succeed we must forget the past, ignore polemics, and focus on common points (Gülen 2002b: 34). Some of the common points are these: both religions take their lineage from Abraham and the prophets. Both are monotheistic religions, that is, they believe in the oneness (*tawhid*) of God, revere Jesus and Mary, believe strongly in the power of faith, and call upon their followers to lead holy lives by means of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and, in some Christian denominations, pilgrimage. It would be mutually beneficial if Islam and the West could enter into dialogue with one another (Fitzgerald 2006:141). Whereas the West possesses economic, military, scientific, and technological strength, Islam has a powerful, uncorrupted, and living spiritual tradition rooted in the Qur'an and *sunnah* or way the Prophet lived.

Gülen speaks forcefully about the power of compassionate love. This notion of compassionate love appears in many of Gülen's writings and sermons (Gülen 2002b: 42). Where does he derive this idea? His sources seem to be the Qur'an itself, the *hadith* or stories about what Muhammad did, and in his reading of the Sufi tradition, particularly Mevlana Rumi, the poet and mystic (Gülen 2004b:149). Gülen considers the love of God to be the purest source of compassionate love in the world. On the individual level we may call compassionate love the sultan that reigns on the throne of the human heart. On the social level there exists nothing more real or more lasting than love in any nation or society. Gülen waxes poetically in speaking of love describing it as the most radiant light, the greatest power in the world, and the chain or link that binds one person to another (Gülen 2004a:1). For Gülen it is axiomatic that our love should be as vast as the ocean and we should take every soul to our bosom (Gülen 2004d: 31).

These three entities-- tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and compassionate love-- are Gülen's positive response to Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis. Where Huntington sees conflict, Gülen sees peace. Where Huntington has a decidedly pessimistic view of the relationship between Islam and the West, Gülen speaks of hope and optimism. How do we account for the difference between the two perspectives? My answer would be this. If Huntington views the world as a political scientist, Gülen looks upon the same world through the lens of his Muslim faith (Gülen 2004d: 138).

Gülen's faith may be compared to a glass of water, without color, without odor, without taste, yet when held up to the light of day it is a prism that reflects and captures all the beauty, mystery, and wonder in the universe. Reality does not change. But our view of reality does change depending on the vantage-point from which we approach it. Faith gives us "new eyes." Faith is akin to the plastic lens we put on to see a movie in three dimensions. If we take off this lens during the movie, the screen looks blurred. With them on, reality appears the way it is. Mr. Gülen would remind Mr. Huntington that there are many more things under the heavens than are thought of in his political philosophy.

There are several practical implications to what Gülen proposes. First, one must distinguish between Islam as a religion and global Islamism which is a political ideology dressed in religious imagery and apocalyptic language (Desai, 2007, 96). As a religion Islam stands for tolerance, peace, dialogue, and compassionate love. However, ideologically, global Islamism is decidedly similar to secular ideologies of terror such as Leninism, the Baader-Meinhof Gang, and the Red Brigades, who were prepared to unleash violence against their own people.

Second, Gülen would remind us that if we want to start a revolution, we must begin with ourselves. We must eliminate from our vocabulary such words as "hatred," "enemy", and "revenge." Rather than striking back at others, we must 'retaliate' against others using gentleness and forgiveness as our *modus operandi*. We are called, says Gülen, to reach out in love to others with whom we interact on a daily basis. Thus we will be agents of change within our own circle of friends. In this way we will bridge the gap between Islam and the West in an infinitely small but important way.

Part III: Some Reflections on the Debate

The differences between Huntington and Gülen are stark. Where Huntington thinks in terms of polarities, Islam *or* the West in conflict with one another, Gülen opts for a more holistic view of global politics. Gülen sees Islam and the West working together in a harmonious fashion. In this connection the operative term for Gülen is dialogue. I would also point out that Huntington as a representative of the Western mind-set takes a wholly secular view of global politics. Gülen, on the contrary, takes a transcendent point of view, that is, he looks at global politics through the lens of his Islamic faith.

In this final section I raise the question "where does the truth lie?" Will there be a clash of civilizations as Huntington suggests or should we look forward in the twenty-first century to a "dialogue of civilizations," that is, to a more hopeful view of global politics in accordance with the vision of Gülen? My sympathies are decidedly much more in alignment with those of Gülen for these reasons:

- i. In my opinion Huntington thinks too much in terms of dichotomies, for example, Islam vs. the West, and he does not make the necessary distinctions and shades of nuances. Huntington speaks of "Islam" and the "West" as if these are monolithic entities. Are not the terms, Islam, and the West, emaciating abstracts? I would argue that cultures and civilizations are not distinct boxes (Halliday 2005:126). For example, Japanese culture borrows substantive elements from China, India, and lately the United States. Christianity is the largest religion in the West yet where does Christianity take its origin if not from the Middle East? Every civilization, every culture, every religion, every language interacts with other civilizations,

cultures, religions, and languages. Religions, for instance, do not exist in hermetically sealed chambers. Tibetan Buddhism had a symbiotic relationship with the Bon culture, so that Buddhism in Tibet differs greatly from Mahayana Buddhism as found in Korea.

Is not Islam today in and of the West, just as the West is in and of Islam? Are there not twenty million Muslim faithful in the West, six million of who live in the United States? There are over 1.6 million Muslims living in the United Kingdom, 38% of whom live in London, which has over 1,070 mosques, Muslim centres, and organizations. And do not many Muslim countries have a large and in some cases an equal number of Christians? Islam is no longer the religion of strangers in the West but the religion of next door neighbors. Muslims share with Christians such things as neighborhoods, schools, athletic facilities, hospitals, and cemeteries (Ayoub 2007:67).

I would note that both China and India maintain that the West is one civilization block derived from three parts, viz., Europe, Byzantium, and the world of Mediterranean Islam (Sullivan 2005:141). Finally, I would observe that the Ottomans were more European than Asian. The sultans very often married European women and the elite government officials in the Ottoman Empire were all converts from Europe. In fact, some nationalist Turks today still blame the Ottomans for suppressing Turks living at the time of their rule.

- ii. Were not many past wars intra-civilization or intra-cultural ones? Were not the most violent conflicts of the twentieth century between Christian nations in Europe? The Iran-Iraq war was within the same Islamic civilization. This war lasted from 1980-88 and was very bloody. Two other examples may clarify matters. For years there has been a serious tension in Southeast Asia between China and Japan. However, both countries have deep roots in the Confucian tradition. On the border of Iran we have Armenian Christians in a dispute with Azerbaijani Shiites over the region of Karabakh. Yet Turkey, a Muslim country, supports the Azerbaijani Shiites because Iran, its strategic rival, supports the Armenian Christians. Would anyone want to call this a *sidam al-hadharat* or a clash of civilizations? (Halliday 2005:126).
- iii. Mr. Huntington observes that the relationship between Islam and the West has been conflictual for the past fourteen centuries. Hence he argues that this adversarial relationship will continue on into the future. I have a different take on history. I would not deny that Christians and Muslims have been at odds over the centuries, going back at least to the time of the Crusade against Islam in Spain and in West Asia, or the annual Ottoman campaign in Europe (Robinson 2005:86). There have been times, though, when Islam and Christianity have interacted in a mutually beneficial way, yet Mr. Huntington seems to ignore this part of history. There are some Christian monasteries today in Anatolia, in the Tur Abdin region which go back to the year 570. In these monasteries the monks and laity still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus. These monasteries have survived until now thanks to the often forgotten tolerance of Islam vis-à-vis its Christian subjects (Dalrymple 2005: 94).

When first confronted by the armies of the Prophet Muhammad, the early Byzantines thought that Islam was a variant of Christianity. This is not altogether surprising when both religions have prophets, accept the New Testament as a sacred scripture, speak of Jesus and Mary, place a premium on holiness of life, and stress such spiritual practices as almsgiving, fasting, and daily prayer. For this

and other reasons the early Muslims treated Jews and Christians with respect. For example, when the second caliph, Abu Bakr, stood on the borders of Syria he instructed his soldiers that they would find monks in their cells but please do not bother them, because they have secluded themselves for the sake of God (Dalrymple 2005:95).

When the third caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab visited Syria, he stayed with the bishop of Ayla and made a point of meeting with the Christian holy men in the town. Umar ibn al-Khattab did not pray in a church, fearing that if he did, Muslims would convert the church into a mosque after he left the town. Muslims and Christians prayed side by side for many years in the great churches of the Middle East. At Damascus, for example, Muslims and Christians used the basilica of St. John for worship, though, fifty years later the building became known as the great Umayyad mosque (Dalrymple 2005: 95). I would also note that Muslims, Christians, and Jews living in Spain created a rich cultural synthesis which saw its acme in terms of high quality architecture, art, and literature, which lasted under Muslim rule until 1492 (Ahmed 2005:106). And Arab-Muslim knowledge transmitted through Spain and Italy greatly benefited and enriched medieval Europe. Up until the nineteenth century many Europeans measured themselves against the world of Islam (Robinson 2005:87).

Mr. Gülen has written a very perceptive book on Sufism. Islamic mysticism or Sufism (*tasawwuf*) refers to a lifelong process of spiritual development. I contend that Sufism has been greatly influenced by Christianity. The word, *suf*, means wool, the distinctive clothing material of Eastern Christian monks adopted by Islam's early mystics and holy men. Sufism has always had an affinity with the desert, stressed miracles, visions, and mortification of the flesh all of which show remarkable similarities to the mystical strands of Eastern Christianity. In fact, Mevlana Rumi tried to reconcile both religions. Moreover, the more radical Sufis and Eastern Christian mystics wore heavy chains. By punishing the flesh both groups of ascetics endeavored to induce spiritual ecstasy and visions (Dalrymple 2005:97).

The point I draw from this is that Christian and Muslim worlds have shaped each other. As Francis Robinson has demonstrated, the roots of Islamic civilization are found in the monotheistic and Hellenistic traditions of the Eastern Roman Empire. He argues that Islam's universalism comes from the religious and political universalism of Constantine's Byzantine Empire (Robinson 2005: 87). William Dalrymple has shown that the Muslim prostrations and bowings in the Muslim *salat* or prayer seem to have their roots in the older Syrian Orthodox tradition still practiced in churches without pews in the Levant, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel (Dalrymple 2005:96).

- iv.** Part of the tension between Christianity and Islam at least historically has been the exclusive truth claims both religions have made (Knitter 1995:26). Scholars in religious studies today are beginning to realize that no religion has a total monopoly on the truth and salvation. (Knitter 2002: 216). Rather, each religion has its own tradition and spiritual heritage. Some Muslims now understand that religious diversity is divinely ordained (Qur'an 5:48). Muslims believe that all the biblical prophets and Prophet Muhammad were sent by the very same God. Muslims have an obligation to understand and respect other religious paths in the interests of justice, love, peace, social harmony and in the interest of truth. The Declaration

on Non-Christian Religions from the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) gives a theological basis for a fruitful dialogue between Muslims and Catholics (Hinze 2006: 222). Mr. Gülen understands how beneficial such a dialogue can be since Islam and Christianity have between them over two billion followers, more than any other two religions in the world.

- v. Theological and religious reasons may have been a large part of the conflict between Islam and Christianity in the past. Today that is less the case. The problem between Islam and the West has little to do with the Qur'an or the New Testament. Rather, it concerns power, both global and local. I see the so-called clash of civilizations as a conflict with multiple, conventional causes (Pfaff 2006:13). Some observers believe that the central driver in global tensions concerns the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian territories (Bennis 2003: 50). This does not mean that it is the overt cause of all tensions between Western and Muslim societies. However, the Israeli-Palestinian issue has symbolic value, coloring political and cross-cultural relations that transcend its limited geographic scope. It would be beyond the parameters of this paper to fully make this argument. I mention it only to move on.

Gülen is absolutely correct in his assertion that cultures need not clash. They can co-exist. We need to accept, yes even rejoice in diversity instead of rejecting it. God made us in his own image yet we all came out differently. Our challenge is this: we must somehow find God's image in someone whose color is different, who speaks a different language, or worships God differently than we do (Sacks 2005: 134). I am reminded of the words of Imam Abd al-Raouf who said: "We earnestly urge (our friends in the West) to go back to God, to turn their face to Him... What was morally right for Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad must be the same for us whether we live in America, Europe, Asia, or Africa. We all should remember that we are brothers, members of the (same) human family. (Therefore) let us live together in peace" (Boase 2005:154).