

“A STATION ABOVE THAT OF ANGELS”: THE VISION OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION WITHIN PLURALISTIC SOCIETIES IN THE THOUGHT OF FETHULLAH GÜLEN - A STUDY OF CONTRASTS BETWEEN TURKEY AND THE UK

Ian Williams

Abstract

Gülen cites ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib as saying, ‘... if a person’s intellect dominates his or her desire and ferocity, he or she rises to a station above that of angels ...’.

Both historically as well as in modern contexts Muslim education is not characterised by uniformity but rather by a plurality of actors, institutions, ideas and political milieus. The two central questions are: What is required to live as a Muslim in the present world? Who is qualified to teach in this time? The debate over the nature and purpose of Islamic education is no recent phenomenon. It has been conducted for the past two centuries throughout the Islamic world: the transmission of both spiritual and empirical knowledge has always been dependent upon the support of religious, social and political authorities.

Based on fieldwork in Turkey and the UK amongst schools associated with the Gülen movement, examination of national government policies and on readings of contemporary Muslim educationalists, this paper seeks to examine the ideals of Fethullah Gülen on contemporary Islamic and religious education. It reports critically on the contribution of these schools to social cohesion, inter-religious dialogue and common ambitions for every child and student.

We should accept the fact that there is a specific way of being Muslim, which reflects the Turkish understanding and practices in those regions [which] stretch from Central Asia to the Balkans. [Ocak 1996 79]

Islam, a rich and strong tradition in many diverse societies is both a living faith and in every generation has been the means of enabling Muslims to address social developments, justice, and both corporate and individual questions of identity and ethics. Drawing on the Qur'an, *Hadith*, *Sunnah* and *fiqh* new Islamic social movements have constantly formed fresh public spaces in which new identities and lifestyles could emerge. Some of the finest expressions of Islam have occurred in the most pluralist religio-social circumstances when intellectual discourse, educational achievements and social harmony have flourished. Amongst contemporary Islamic thinkers who are professedly concerned to interpret the sources and their practice in an "Islamically correct" manner is Fethullah Gülen [b. 1938], the spiritual father of what is probably the most active Turkish-Islamic movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In considering this movement however, one soon realizes that Fethullah Gülen is neither an innovator with a new and unique theology nor a revolutionary. His understanding of Islam is oriented within the conservative mainstream and his arguments are rooted in the traditional sources of Islam. They stand in a lineage represented as I shall argue through al-Ghazali, Mevlana Jalal ud-Din Rumi, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, and in company with Muhammad Asad and Muhammad Naquib Syed Al-Attas, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Nonetheless, in less than thirty years his followers as Islamic activists have made significant contributions to inter-communal and national peace, inter-religious dialogue, economic development, and most certainly in the field of education out of all proportion to their numbers. Moreover, this is a de-centralised polymorphic social movement.

A Classical and a Contemporary Model of Education

In the classical period of Islam's expansion in the 10th and 11th centuries ce one of that era's significant scholars and educators and indeed regarded as such throughout the history of Islam was Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali [1058 - 1111]. According to Al-Ghazali,

...knowledge exists potentially in the human soul like the seed in the soil; by learning the potential becomes actual.... [Al-Ghazali, 1995 167]

The child, Al-Ghazali wrote,

...is a trust (placed by God) in the hands of his parents, and his innocent heart is a precious element capable of taking impressions. [Al-Ghazali, 1998. 145]

The way the child relates to the world at large occupies a large concern in Al-Ghazali's mind. In concert with Ibn Al-Hajj [1258 – 1336], he stresses the moral and spiritual development of a child. So, alongside and in harmony with his or her development intellectually and in expertise there is the nurturing and flourishing of *tarbiyya* i.e. the development of correct manners, etiquette, attitudes towards parents, elders and teachers and spiritual observances. Thus as a child grows he or she understands that to love money is fruitless; he or she learns to respect rules of cleanliness; to begin fasting in Ramadan; and to avoid ostentatious clothes and jewellery. *Tarbiyyah* involves speaking with courtesy; and living towards God as he has

revealed the ways for faithful people to act; and consequently to regard every human as he or she would like to be treated.

The perspective of Al-Ghazali centres upon personal effort in the search for truth; and this presupposes, he insists, a received education and the direction of a master. Education (*tarbiyyah*), Al-Ghazali states in *Ayyuha l-walad* is like “the labour of the farmer, who uproots the weeds, trims wheat so as it grows better and gives a better harvest.” [1995: 267]. Every pupil needs a teacher to guide him or her in the right direction. To try to do so without leads to the worst illusions. In *Ayyuha l-walad* the pupil’s outward respect for his or her teacher is evidence of esteem for such a person in their heart.

Even more on this matter, in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, the teacher, Al-Ghazali holds, carries eight duties. Primarily he or she is a parent for a pupil. Teaching is for the sake of God. Prudence should be the mark of counsel for a student. Any reprimand must be moderate and in private rather than in public. In addition, one other duty of the teacher is to make sure that what he or she teaches is pursued in his or her own life and that their actions do not contradict their words.

In a similar fashion Fethullah Gülen as a modern Muslim thinker has reflected upon the ideals of an Islamic education, the character of the teacher and the demeanour of the pupil and student. In his writings, he seeks conciliation between the empirical sciences, which are concerned with the material world, and *tarbiyyah*, which is the focus of the spiritual realms. According to Gülen this reunion occurs with the presence of knowledge and love. Knowledge is the province of the sciences and provides students with the intellectual abilities to benefit others. Alone, however, the sciences are insufficient in leading people to benefit others. Love is essential.

For Gülen [2002: 41], “Love is a person’s most essential element” By love, Gülen means self-sacrificing love that initiates action by absolute obedience to God and out of concern for others rather than individual reward or utilitarian calculations for one’s happiness. This love entails self-sacrifice, self-denial, and a personal conviction to transform life on earth [Yavuz, 2003, 34]. Such a love is the basis of true pedagogy.

Consequently, not all teachers are educators in Fethullah Gülen’s perspective as he asserts “Education is different from teaching. Most people can teach, but only a very few can educate” [2004, 208]. Teaching, in other words, is merely the conveying of knowledge; whilst education involves giving knowledge but also imparting self-sacrificing love and moral guidance:

True teachers sow the pure seed and preserve it. They occupy themselves with what is good and wholesome, and lead and guide the children through life and whatever events they may encounter. [Gülen, 2004, 208b.]

Thus, teaching is a spiritual activity and to enable students to embrace change and to be transformed is a teacher’s “foremost duty” [Gülen, 1998 & 2004]. Teachers are responsible for providing knowledge with the wisdom to use it and for providing moral guidance by embodying spirituality and love.

The objective of Gülen’s educational vision is to raise a “Golden Generation,” a generation of ideal universal individuals, individuals who love truth, who integrate spirituality and knowledge, who work to benefit society [Gülen, 1998]. Such a person is *zul-cenaheyn* “one who possesses two wings,” exhibiting a “marriage of mind and heart” [Gülen, 1996b] with a merging of spiritual and ethical values with contemporary science and understanding [Gülen,

2004] This will create a “genuinely enlightened people” [Gülen, 1996a] who will altruistically be servants to others. [Gülen, 2000].

If we really wish our children to have faith, all our attitudes and sensitivities in certain subjects, the way we go to bed and get up, the way we exert ourselves in prayer, the way we spread our affectionate wings over our children, must all reflect our faith in Allah and their hearts must be filled with such faith. We should always try to be the ideal for them, to avoid any kind of behaviour, which might make them feel contempt for us.

We should always try to maintain dignity and to remain elevated in their view, so that what we tell them will influence their hearts and they will not rebel against our wishes. In this respect, it can be said that a father who lacks seriousness can probably be the friend of his children; but he can never be their teacher, and he will fail to bring them up the way he wants. [Gülen, Bringing up a Child with Multiple Abilities, <http://en.fgülen.com>. 11.26.2004a]

This vision has led Gülen and his followers from the 1980’s have to initiate an educational project of building institutions in different parts of the world. In Turkey, the Caucasus, Africa, Russia, and the Philippines amongst several socio-geographical contexts hundreds of schools with seven universities have been founded serving diverse religious communities and those of no faith affiliation [Agai 2007. 159].

These institutions resemble other schools in terms of curriculum and resources, IT and laboratory facilities, language teaching and expertise are of a high standard, which result in creditable achievements by students. This is acknowledged by a range of observers and certainly in my fieldwork examination of such schools in Turkey, the USA and Africa. [Agai, 2003; 48-68; Balci, 2003; 151-176; Özdalga, 2000; Yavuz, 2003]. Michel [2003. 70] comments that the student in these schools and higher education institutions have outstanding performance in academic competitions in the natural sciences, information sciences, and languages, and he considers them “to be among the most dynamic and worthwhile educational enterprises ... in the world”

Two Contemporary Contexts in Contrast

The two foci of this paper viz the UK and Turkey have and are both witnessing and forging changes within their respective educational systems to meet the demands of modern economies, globalization, and the creation of socially cohesive if pluralist societies

In the UK we have as the means of education for children and young people from the age of four to eighteen years a “dual system”. In essence, a hybrid model of both state, independent, and faith sector provision. A further refinement of this system however, is that whilst we may refer to the “UK” as a single entity state it is also with devolved government to Scotland [1998], Wales [1998], and Ulster [2007] a “four nations state”. Powers are devolved in education and other areas to the respective national assemblies in Edinburgh, Cardiff, and Belfast. Consequently, whilst my research focuses upon the English and Welsh contexts of educational provision it is still applicable to the wider “UK” with its common structure of state, independent, and faith schools. Arguably, in the UK we face continuing debate and government initiatives to create a holistic model of education i.e. a broad and balanced curriculum and ethos based on an understanding of the full potential of the human being and a system of pedagogy designed to awaken and develop that potential.

However, a process has also faced us since 1988 with bureaucracy, league tables, school inspection regimens, target setting and quantification. In essence, these are managerially

controlled objectives with a narrow prescriptive content. Behind these policies is an agenda of education that until recently has been aligned to a utilitarian concept of schooling with a reduction of truly holistic education to a narrow band of skills for the workplace. The goals have been centered upon economic performance, competition, and efficiency above all else.

The then DfES [Department for Education and Skills] proposed in a White Paper, *Schools: Achieving Success* [DfES, 2001] such a policy and openly stated it in the document's introduction.

The success of our children at school is crucial to the economic health and social cohesion of the country, as well as to their own life chances and personal fulfillment. [DfES. 2001. 8]

We need to note the priorities which are placed first in the sentence.. The response from the Church of England's Board of Education was salutary.

The Church of England's Board of Education has welcomed the Government White Paper, *Schools achieving success*, published today, but warned against any erosion of the place of religious education and spiritual development in the curriculum.

On plans to develop 'Education with Character', Canon Hall welcomed the idea but warned, "We shall be particularly interested in the introduction of flexibility into the 14 to 19 curriculum, to ensure that the place of religious education and spiritual development is not eroded. [<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news,05/09/2001>]

Certainly, the 1988 Education Reform Act introduced by the then Conservative Government of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher had stated that the newly instituted National Curriculum would

...promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society... [and that]... the curriculum for every maintained school shall comprise a basic curriculum which includes - (a) provision for religious education for all registered pupils at the school. [<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988>].

During the period of Conservative Governments from 1979 – 1997 faith based schools were perceived as integral to the "dual system" partnership of education especially as they seemed to respond to parental i.e. client demand for such a model of education in a free market economy [Parker-Jenkins, Hartas & Irving 2005]. Significant debate continued through this time however, on the definition of "spiritual" and "spirituality" as aspects of the curriculum. Did they suffuse the programmes of study in the empirical sciences, aesthetic and creative arts, and the humanities, or were they the preserve of Religious Education?

In Religious Education for example, there may be a moment when "learning about religion" in beliefs, rituals or places of pilgrimage is transformed into "learning from religion" with silence, music, art, personal affirmations of faith, or accounts of visits to significant places. This is the transition from the objective teaching and study of religion to an inward experience, addressing existential questions of ultimate concern, and encounter with mystery. Tillich notes "...such an experience presupposes that the spiritual life is taken seriously, that is as a matter of ultimate concern." [Tillich 1962. 54]. Education in this perception becomes spiritual whenever a lesson that is being delivered irrespective of the subject moves beyond the mundane into the supramundane and faces issues of the fundamental meaning and purpose of life. Fethullah Gülen writes in a similar vein,

Those believing souls who are capable of considering the location and the position of the world with its place and importance before God can acquire oceans as wide as the universe from this droplet; possess the stars and the sun through this miniature universe; transform the limited time

spent on it into an eternal life time. All of these are possible, if all the abilities entrusted to or hidden in the essence of the human being are used rightly without being squandered.

In reality, for those who can see with the light of faith, all these beauties folded into one another are only clear signs of His Divine Being, and the human being is an interpreter who can read and understand those signs. The matter shows the path to the secrets beyond the seen to those believers who can filter events through intellect, consciousness, and feelings within a balance. Through time divine secrets diffuse into their souls, and their hearts become observatories of the Divine Attributes. In this way, the torments originating from not knowing the Creator are torn away and they disappear; light covers all. [Gülen 2004c]

Gülen is arguing for a distinction between “ordinary” and “extraordinary” knowledge that is implicit in the ideals of UK education but explicit in the Turkish foundation schools sponsored by his communities. Thus, “everyday education” is transformed into “unexpectedly spiritual” education when learning ceases to glide over the surface facts of a subject and commences to come to grips with issues of ultimate significance and truth that frame the very marrow of our humanity and eternal destiny. Without such ultimate concerns Gülen argues that our lives lack passion, focus, seriousness, selfless service and creativity; with such passion however a new generation,

... will pour out to the needy hearts the purest inspirations of their hearts, which are nourished in the higher realms and they will bring forth the newest formations in all sections of society. The inauspiciousness and waste, the insanity, obsessions, and delirium of successive generations in our near past occurred, to a great extent, because they had not met such a generation of hope. [The Generations of Hope – I <http://en.fguen.com> 2005]

This is evident in the “Turkish” schools that I have visited in the USA, Turkey, and the Transcaucasian states where a generation of gifted Turkish graduates are teaching a curriculum in a spiritual way without overt reference to religious propositions and explicit religious education.

Prior to the 1997 UK General Election the then leader of the [new] Labour Party Mr. Tony Blair who was to become Prime Minister had promised that “Education, Education, Education” would be the “number one” priority for a new government under his leadership. In 2002, five years later after another successful election victory that year Mr. Blair as Prime Minister reiterated his commitment to education. Nevertheless, it might be asked what kind of education? In an interview reported in the *Times Educational Supplement* of July 5, 2002, Blair stated that

Education is and remains the absolute number one priority for the country because without a quality education system and an educated workforce, we cannot succeed economically.

He defended the “ladder” of schools outlined by Ms Morris with strugglers at the bottom of five categories and beacon and specialist schools at the top. “It is not a hierarchy. It is an escalator. It is not a case of penalising schools that are not specialising. We are increasing funding for all. [TES, 05 / 07 / 2002.]

The real priority was clear and identified with the previous year’s White Paper viz. that economic power governed educational policy.

In John Taylor Gatto’s work *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, David H. Albert refers to the words of the social philosopher Hannah Arendt that “The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any.” [Gatto 2000. 46]

Gatto questions both the suppositions and configurations which underlie modern state education in his case within the USA but which are also present in UK government educational policy. It is a process, which stresses economic goals and moulding children who are dependent, conforming, materialistic, and lacking in curiosity, imagination, self-knowledge, and powers of reflection.

Supporting the utilitarian agenda in the United Kingdom, and also fuelled by pressure to do well in league tables of performance, is a vigorous testing regime of schools and curriculum delivery. A research project however, initiated by the National Union of Teachers and the University of Warwick's Institute of Education in 2003 revealed,

Respondents felt most strongly that testing narrowed the curriculum, and distorted the educational experience of children. They felt that excessive time, workload, and stress for children were not justified by the accuracy of the test results on individuals. [Neill 2003. 3]

Almost half the weekly timetable in schools in England and Wales can now taken up by numeracy and literacy teaching with children as young as seven are being tested every week on their reading. The disproportionate emphasis on the teaching and perpetual testing of a narrow band of literacy and numeracy skills, which are deemed essential for economic survival, removes the heart and soul out of education. Neill concluded that teaching each day did not allow for a broad and balanced curriculum, and that creative subjects such as art, drama, and music were being increasingly eroded out of the classroom [Neill 2003. 9]. Subsequent government policy statements have reiterated these practices and broadened the purview of education to embrace additional dimensions of children's well-being [DfES 2003a and 2003b].

The development of education in modern Turkey since 1922 may be cryptically summarized in words of Hannah Arendt,

The quest for meaning, which relentlessly dissolves and examines anew all accepted doctrines and rules, can at any moment turn against itself, produce a reversal of the old values, and declare these contraries to be new values. [Arendt, 1978. 176]

Following the demise of the Ottoman Empire one of the first legislative proposals of the new republic was the "Law of Unification of Instruction". The pluralism of the empire it was thought had prevented the Turkish people from realizing their nationhood; thus by placing all educational institutions but the military academies under the Ministry of Education a single national identity would be attained.

Drawing upon theories of corporate solidarism and collective consciousness the sociologist Ziya Gokalp [1876 - 1924] propounded ideas that remain influential in Turkish pedagogy. Essentially, he argued that the decline of the Ottoman sphere was a result of unequal and incompatible systems of knowledge. Civilisations and cultures could be placed in an evolutionary typology with Western / European modernity as the zenith.

In this country there are three layers of people differing from each other in civilization and education: the common people, the men educated in medreses, the men educated in modern [secular] schools.....That means that one portion of our nation is living in an ancient, another in a medieval, and a third in a modern age. How can the life of the nation be normal with such a threefold life? How can we be a real nation without unifying this threefold education? [Gokalp 1959. 278.]

For Gokalp this unification of education in order to coalesce the new nation's citizens involved combining the best aspects of each civilisational stream and rejecting their respective

weaknesses. These would embrace the Turkish national myth and a rational Islam together with Western empirical science and technology. Moreover, Gokalp reinterpreted two established concepts of knowledge viz, *terbiye* and *talim* respectively until that time representing moral behaviour as understood by al-Ghazali and Qur'anic focused knowledge. For Gokalp they would now mean national culture within which Islam would reside as an aspect and empirical knowledge. This pedagogical understanding suffused subsequent state educational policy under Mustapha Kemal Atatürk [1881 – 1938] the republic's first President except that religion was no longer seen as an instrument of creating a Turkish national identity.

In contrast to developments in the UK, in this period the early Turkish republican implementation of educational policies undertook a desecularisation process. This course of action reached its peak between 1933 – 1935 when the Hagia Sofia in Istanbul was converted symbolically into a museum, religious titles were abolished, wearing of distinctive religious dress outside places of worship was prohibited, Sunday became the sabbath day of rest, and texts connected with religion were proscribed from libraries. It would only be during the 1939 – 1945 global conflict when Turkey adopted a neutral stance until early 1945 that religion and Islam in particular re-entered the public domain [Kaplan 2006. 86].

With the reintroduction of multi-party politics from 1950 advocates and opponents of either the teaching of Islam or the involvement of observant Muslims in Turkish education would become a considerable area of debate. The history of the Turkish Republic however, is a series of defining moments and dates, which was exemplified on 18th September 1990 with the publication of a report on the state of Turkish education [Baloglu, 1990]. Sponsored by the prominent Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association [*Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği*: TUSIAD] it drew attention to the shortcomings of the curriculum and the brevity of compulsory education. Equally, however, the report questioned how the reappearance of the Imam Hatip middle and high religious schools could enhance national unity and educational achievement.

Paradoxically, even the secular ideology of education in Turkey uses discourse that reflects Qur'anic and historic Muslim ideals. A school is a second home, fellow pupils and students are akin to brothers and sisters, and teachers are compared to parents in their status [Gil'adi 1992. 83]. Opponents and sceptics of religious schools have emphasised the importance of Turkey entering the Western / European area of liberal capitalism and scientific-technological advance; whilst promoters of religious schooling have stressed the values of Islam as keys to national renewal and stability. The Turkish national elections of 2007 embraced such a debate in the area of education amongst others as signifiers of national unity and character in a diverse society.

Such a debate as I will now consider also continues about UK education and its strategic place in framing a national identity of citizenship. In this context as in Turkey the place of religion and the participation of faith traditions in education and their framing of social capital is both contested and promoted. In both situations, the Gülen sponsored model of schools and higher education offers a pedagogic praxis and a dialogic instrument of an alternative middle way.

“Faith Schools” or Schools With “Faith”?

The existence of “Faith Sector” schools in the UK dates back to the introduction of state education in 1870, when state-funded schools supplemented, and state funding assisted, the existing provision of schools by churches and other groups. This ‘dual system’ has continued

until today, with several categories of state funded faith schools: ‘voluntary controlled’, where the local education authority provides all of the funding in return for control notably over the governing body; and ‘voluntary aided’, where the voluntary organisation provides 10% of the budget in return for having more control over religious education and governing body. Christian [Church of England and Roman Catholic] and Jewish Faith traditions adopted this cooperative existence. A complex history therefore, lies behind the current situation. Not all Christian traditions however, accepted this pattern; members of the Free Churches in the late 19th c preferred to face legal penalties rather than support Anglican or even Roman Catholic schools by local taxation [Chadwick 2001. 475-487].

An additional complexity was introduced in 1998 when schools with a religious foundation other than Christianity and Judaism could enter this system and in particular Muslim schools. A survey of articles and letters to the educational and general press during 2001–2002, given the significant events that occurred during that period, revealed an element of racism and Islamophobia in the objections to state-funded faith schools (Cush, 2003. 10-15).

For example, a MORI poll conducted for the *Times Educational Supplement* in November 2001 revealed that only 27% opposed the increase in Church schools, whereas the figure rose to 43% when Muslim and Sikh schools were added to the question [Jackson 2001.2-6 & 2003. 86–152] Although it might seem to be an issue of marginal importance compared with other debates about education today, the ‘faith schools’ discussion provides a case study that soon leads into fundamental questions about the aims and purpose of education, views on human nature, ultimate reality, truth and the meaning of life, and the education policies of a government.

This same MORI poll also reported that the main reasons given for parents supporting faith schools in the UK are a desire for their children to be educated in the same values and beliefs as their family [35%]; good discipline [28%]; and religious ethos [27%]. Only 10% cited good exam results. It is also vital to note the reasons given by parents for sending their children to faith schools, which concern family values and beliefs and religious ethos and identity. The best Islamic education will ensure this breadth of education is added to their ethical and spiritual appeal.

An Islamic education encompasses the two traditional categories of knowledge, and the hierarchical relationship between them: revealed knowledge, attained through the religious sciences; and acquired knowledge, attained through the rational, intellectual, and philosophical sciences. In the worldview of *tawheed* [divine unity], knowledge is holistic and there is no compartmentalisation of knowledge into religious and secular spheres. Both types of knowledge contribute to the strengthening of faith, the former through a careful study of the revealed word of God and the latter through a meticulous, systematic study of the world of humanity and nature. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s [1878 – 1960] writings such as the *Risale i-Nur* and the Nurcu movement he stirred were formative in Gülen’s own spiritual and intellectual development. Nursi wrote,

We Muslims, who are students of the Qur’an, follow proof. We approach the truths of belief through reason, thought, and our hearts. We do not abandon proof for blind imitation of the clergy like some followers of other religions. Thus, in the future when reason, science, and technology prevail, the Qur’an will surely then rule, which relies on reasoned proofs and makes the reason confirm its pronouncements. [Nursi 1960. 77]

In similar terms Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains

Islamic education is concerned not only with the instruction and training of the mind and the transmission of knowledge (ta'lim) but also with the education of the whole being of men and women (tarbiyah). The teacher is therefore not only a mu'alim, a 'transmitter of knowledge' but also a murabbi, a 'trainer of souls and personalities'. The Islamic educational system never divorced the training of the mind from that of the soul. [Nasr, 2001. 56]

Gülen endorses this perspective,

Preferring the sacred cause over all worldly and animal desires; being steadfast in truth, once it has been discovered, to the degree that you sacrifice all mundane attachments for its sake; enduring all hardships so that future generations will be happy; seeking happiness, not in material or even spiritual pleasures, but in the happiness and well-being of others; never seeking to obtain any posts or positions; and preferring oneself to others in taking on work but preferring others to oneself in receiving wages—these are the essentials of this sacred way of serving the truth. [Gülen 2000. 84]

Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas [b.1931][1997. 98] prefers to regard Islamic education as *ta'dib*, a word related to *adab*. He defines this term in its true sense (before its restriction and debasement of meaning to “a context revolving around cultural refinement and social etiquette”) as “discipline of body, mind and soul” which enables man to recognize and acknowledge “his proper place in the human order” in relation to his self, his family, and his community. This order is “arranged hierarchically in degrees (*darajat*) of excellence based on Qur'anic criteria of intelligence, knowledge, and virtue (*ihsan*).” In this sense, *adab* is “the reflection of wisdom (*hikmah*)” and “the spectacle (*mashhad*) of justice (*'adl*).”

In a recent paper on the application of religious models to educational administration, Aref Atari [2000. 29–56] has shown how the implementation of both the Christian model of “Service-Stewardship” and the Islamic “Khalifah” model “entails a radical transformation in management, thought and practice” away from a hierarchically organized bureaucratic Western model. The goal he describes as a “caring and sharing spirit.” In this climate, trust, love, sympathy, mercy, cooperation, tolerance, and altruism are at least as important as efficiency, effectiveness, competition, professional ambition, and achievement. The outcome is an organisation, which is both “virtue-based and excellence-oriented.” *Shurah*-based management, empowering and working with others, replaces a top-down approach, which manipulates, controls, and works through others.

From such a brief excursus it is evident that Gülen in his own field is offering an Islamic representation of Islam faithful to the origins and applicable to modern conditions.

Teachers should know how to find a way to the student's heart and be able to leave indelible imprints upon his or her mind. They should test the information to be passed on to students by refining their own minds and the prisms of their hearts. A good lesson is one that does more than provide pupils with useful information or skills; it should elevate them into the presence of the unknown. This enables the students to acquire a penetrating vision into the reality of things, and to see each event as a sign of the unseen world. [Gülen 1982. 39]

Cross-Cultural and Inter-Faith Education

Following the 11th September 2001, and the 7th June 2005 Europe and the West with all the hazards that accompany a polarisation of an “Us and the Other” *weltanschauung* should never forget one of the founding principles of its civilisation. The affirmation by Plato that philosophical dialectic, the testing process of critical enquiry through discussion and dialogue, is utterly distinct from and immeasurably superior to rhetoric. This inheritance has ensured that in the contemporary usage of modern European languages, the word “rhetorical”

almost invariably has negative connotations, implying the abuse of language for self-serving ends.

At the same time, Muslims need to recall that one of the founding principles of Islamic civilisation was a dynamic spirit of open-minded enquiry, which Muslim scholars communicated to the Christian, Greek, and Jewish communities in their midst. Muhammad Asad [1900 – 1992] comments,

[The Qur'an], through its insistence on consciousness and knowledge ... engendered among its followers a spirit of intellectual curiosity and independent inquiry, ultimately resulting in that splendid era of learning and scientific research which distinguished the world of Islam at the height of its vigour; and the culture thus fostered by the Qur'an penetrated in countless ways and by-ways into the mind of medieval Europe and gave rise to that revival of Western culture which we call the Renaissance, and thus became in the course of time largely responsible for the birth of what is described as the 'age of science': the age in which we are now living. [Asad 1980. 23]

Similarly, for Gülen the Qur'an is the source, which provides the qiblah or orienting point of reference around which all modes of knowledge and all diverse traditions revolve and cohere. With an allusion to Mevlana Jalal ud-Din Rumi he affirms,

The Qur'an is the Divine Word or Speech sent down to humanity, the best pattern of creation that is uniquely qualified to receive it. Despite the Qur'an's weight and gravity, most people cannot feel and appreciate its significance, for they have closed their senses and faculties to it. Those who alienate themselves and their inner life from the Qur'an receive nothing from it.

For one who is a good "diver"

The Qur'an is an ocean replete with jewels;

While one indifferent to it

Has nothing to receive from it. [Gülen, The Holy Qur'an, <http://en.fgülen.com>, 14 / 09 / 2001]

Cross-cultural and inter-faith dimensions of education and the inter-cultural and inter-faith sensitivity they promote are of the greatest importance at this time. Despite all the talk about globalisation, there is evidence of entrenched parochialism, increasing xenophobia and Islamophobia, racial and cultural prejudice and injustice isolationism, cross-cultural communication breakdown, profound misconstructions of other cultures.

A curriculum which acknowledges whether implicitly or explicitly the contribution of Islam to the development of Western civilisation, not in the sense of dwelling nostalgically on "past glories," but in the deeper sense of finding common ground between Islam and the West is truly,

.....a community of the middle way..... [Surah 2. 143]

The *ummatah wasatan* represents a connecting relationship and a centre of significance in the midst of a world polarised between competing power blocs. Islamic education will renew that essentially Islamic capacity to integrate and accommodate diverse traditions in a spirit of pluralism, as embodied in the historical legacy of Al-Biruni, Ibn Al-Haytham, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Razi, and Suhrawardi.

Conclusion: Synthesis not Syncretism

Pluralism is an environment in which to advance core Islamic values, including the genuinely Islamic concept of human dignity. These values are the same universal values that promote unity in the “secularist” world such as seeking knowledge, equality, freedom, human rights, justice, and selflessness. The principles of a just world order are embedded in the pluralistic vision of Islam and were embodied however imperfectly in the prototypical Islamic societies from Madinah to Andalusia, from periods in Mughal India to the Ottoman fusion, a vision capable of reconciling the demands of multiplicity and concord in a humane framework. This is the vision, which raises humankind to the “station above that of angels”.

However, it must be stressed that such a vision encompasses not only the openness that characterises living traditions, but also a strong commitment to a particular expression of tradition and community. A view of pluralism, which entails commitment as well as openness and respect for diversity, seeks synthesis in relation to a stable, integral core of knowledge, but this is not the same as a syncretic view. This would attempt to blend and mingle different traditions of incompatible principles or beliefs into a new system.

As every human, unlike animals, represents the whole of humanity, individual rights cannot be sacrificed for society, and social rights should depend on individual rights. This is why the basic human rights and freedoms found in the revealed religions were taken on board by a war-weary West. These rights are given priority in all relations. The primary right is the right to life, which is granted by and can only be taken by God. To accentuate the importance of this right in Islam, a basic Qur’anic principle is that:

If one person kills another unjustly, it is the same as if he has killed all of humanity; if one saves another, it is the same as if he has saved all of humanity. [Surah 5:32] [Gülen, At the Threshold of a New Millennium, <http://en.fgülen.com.11.04.2004>]

From the writings and example of Fethullah Gülen the social and educational movement which has thus evolved in association with his name offers a paradoxically non-religious but yet profoundly Islamically motivated movement with the transformation of human society as its objective. These schools and universities emerge from a specific expression of Islam, which is at once conservative, Sufi inspired and innovative in *ijtihad* and *tajdid* religious reasoning and religious reform respectively. Evidence from respondents in dissimilar circumstances attest to a flexible renewalist movement, rational in its expressions of historic Islam yet untrammelled by rigid patterns, a community of the “middle way” uninhibited by political constrictions, and one marked by the spirit of servanthood to humanity.