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#### Recommended Citation

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Toward an Islamic Modernity:

Atatürk, Erdoğan, & Gülen

Kevin Jackson

20 May 2015

The Gülenist movement, also known as Hizmet, is an Islamic reform movement that has arisen recently in Turkey. Centered on the teachings of Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic scholar and teacher, the movement has been the focus of both praise and controversy. Accused of being a dangerous “state within a state”<sup>1</sup> by the Turkish government, it has nevertheless attracted a wide following in Turkey and seeks a global audience. In Hizmet, Fethullah Gülen has developed a movement that offers to reconcile the tensions between Islam and Western modernity, encouraging its followers to keep the Islamic faith while embracing the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century. Despite its appeals to tolerance and modernity, it faces major obstacles to its continued success.

Not least of these is Gülen’s turbulent relationship with the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Erdogan. At first, the Hizmet movement seemed a natural ally for Erdogan and his Islam-friendly AK Party, assisting him in his repeated electoral victories. However, the relationship subsequently soured. The government attempted to shut down a network of Hizmet schools in Turkey and began accusing Gülen of seeking to take power. Some of these accusations were based on a 1999 video in which Gülen apparently called on the Hizmet community to “move within the arteries of the system, without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach all the power systems... You must wait until such time as you have got all the state power, until you have brought to your side all the power of the constitutional institution in Turkey.” These accusations of sinister intent, denied by Gülen, led to his departure to the United States, where he has been based ever since. From his mansion headquarters in Pennsylvania, he continues to provide spiritual leadership to Hizmet.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Franks, “Fethullah Gulen: Powerful but reclusive Turkish cleric,” *BBC*, last modified January 27, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25885817>.

<sup>2</sup> “Profile: Fethullah Gulen’s Hizmet Movement,” *BBC*, last modified December 18, 2013, <http://m.bbc.com/news/world-13503361>.

In a 2014 interview, Gülen discussed some of the issues dividing him and Erdogan. He denied accusations that he had instigated corruption charges against AK party members as retaliation for a move to shut down Hizmet schools. Instead, he maintained that widespread corruption exists in Turkey, and people of various political persuasions were simply doing their duty to expose it without encouragement from him. He also denied being excessively pro-Israeli, merely stating that he recognizes their rights as a people. He claimed to support peace with Kurdish insurgents, though he did express disapproval of Ocalan, their leader. Ocalan, he said, was a terrorist with hostility toward Hizmet schools' expansion in the region.<sup>3</sup> In a much earlier interview, Gulen expressed a belief that the Kurdish issue, or the "southeast issue" as he preferred to call it, could be solved through education bringing Kurds and Turks together instead of by force.<sup>4</sup>

Later on in 2014, Erdogan's government accused Gülen himself of operating a terrorist organization and issued a warrant for his arrest in the wake of numerous arrests of pro-Hizmet journalists. The United States, as generally expected by observers, did not follow through with an extradition of Gülen.<sup>5</sup> For Hizmet's part, its publications insist that Gülen has no worldly ambitions and that the movement shuns politics altogether. "Though a well-known public figure, Gülen has always shied away from involvement in formal

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Franks, "Fethullah Gulen: Powerful but reclusive Turkish cleric," *BBC*, last modified January 27, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25885817>.

<sup>4</sup> "Fethullah Gülen's Views on Turkey's Various Issues," *fgulen.com*, last modified August 30, 1997, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/press/interviews-claims-and-answers/25004-fethullah-gulens-views-on-turkeys-various-issues>.

<sup>5</sup> "Turkey Issues Fethullah Gulen Arrest Warrant," *BBC*, last modified December 19, 2014, <http://m.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30552148>.

politics.”<sup>6</sup> “Gülen's understanding of service permits no expectation of material or political gain.”<sup>7</sup>

The conflict between Erdogan and Gülen is illustrative of the complex issues facing Turkey today. Though currently living in the United States, Gülen is a cleric raised and trained in Turkey. The relationship between Turkey and Islam is a unique one, and deserves examination. Turkey is often seen by Westerners as an example of a “good” Muslim country, meaning it has modernized and secularized. Nevertheless, it is still viewed with enough suspicion to keep it on the fringes of Western culture and discourse. This tension has implications for the Hizmet movement as well as for the nation in general. Culturally as well as geographically, Turkey occupies a unique place between the Middle East and the West. Even Gülen’s biography on his website dedicates a section to a discussion of the Ottoman Empire as preliminary to his own life.<sup>8</sup> By all accounts then, a brief examination of Turkish history will help to put the Hizmet movement in context.

The multinational Ottoman Empire incorporated parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe from 1301 to 1922. As well as containing many nations, it was home to people of various doctrines including Judaism, Orthodox Christianity, and Shiite Islam. Sunni Islam, however, was the faith of the majority of the people and enjoyed state sponsorship. The Sultan, as ruler of the Empire, was considered a protector of the faith. The

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<sup>6</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Essentials of the Islamic Faith* (Somerset: The Light, 2006), xi.

<sup>7</sup> “Edirne, Kırklareli, and Finally Izmir,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/1304-biography/24656-edirne-kirklareli-and-finally-izmir>.

<sup>8</sup> “The Physical, Historical, and Sociological Background,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/1304-biography/24649-the-physical-historical-and-sociological-background>.

Empire was comparatively tolerant and assimilationist for the time.<sup>9</sup> The Ottoman period is remembered by some as a golden age of balance and harmony:

*The Islamic civilization inherited by the Ottomans viewed humanity and life as a whole. On the one hand, it valued science as the "mind's light"... On the other hand, it based its spiritual foundation on the dynamics and values of Islam, and thereby showed itself as a civilization of the mind, the heart, and the spirit.*<sup>10</sup>

By World War I, however, the Empire had clearly lost its edge in global politics. Its trade routes had been bypassed, and European powers were rising. The Ottoman Empire itself became increasingly decentralized and corrupt.<sup>11</sup> Nationalist sentiment spread around the world, threatening the multinational Ottoman system. Zionism began to gain steam in the late 1800s. Armenians in the Empire underwent separatist movements and persecution, two trends that heavily reinforced each other. Arab nationalism gained steam. Albania left the Empire in 1912.<sup>12</sup>

As the Empire went into decline, the Young Turk movement advocated nationalism for Turkey itself. In their "Proclamation for the Ottoman Empire," the Young Turks prescribed democratization, secularization, and nationalism. They demanded a Constitution based on the national will and majority rule rather than on the prerogative of the Sultan. To this end, they sought universal suffrage and equal treatment for all citizens regardless of ethnicity or religion. This implied, along with a grant of civil rights, that all citizens would

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<sup>9</sup> "Ottoman Empire (1301-1922)," *BBC*, last modified September 29, 2004, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/ottomanempire\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/ottomanempire_1.shtml).

<sup>10</sup> "The Physical, Historical, and Sociological Background," *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/1304-biography/24649-the-physical-historical-and-sociological-background>.

<sup>11</sup> "Ottoman Empire (1301-1922)," *BBC*, last modified September 29, 2004, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/ottomanempire\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/ottomanempire_1.shtml).

<sup>12</sup> Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), 284, 288-92.

be subsumed into the Turkish nation-state. The state was to provide free, homogenous public education in Turkish to all citizens.<sup>13</sup>

Rather than attempt to suppress this revolutionary movement, the government caved. By 1914, the Sultan was powerless and the Young Turks had consolidated their hold on the government through the Committee of Union and Progress. New philosophies were coming into play in Turkey. Secularization, with an accompanying alteration in the relationship between sexes, was on the horizon. Men and women were to have equal rights as citizens. The Islamic dress code was no longer to be encouraged for women. Polygamy in the royal family was to disappear. Rationalism was to take hold in public discourse. Science, not Islam, was to provide answers to social ills. Religion was to be relegated to private life, while Social Darwinism and materialism were to move to the forefront in society. All this was still mostly theoretical. Nevertheless, these strands of thought helped to unite the Young Turk movement as they sought to take their place in modern Western civilization.<sup>14</sup> This put Turkey on a track leading away from Islamic law and politics. Religious law was now considered to be anti-modern, part of a discredited, antiquated way of life.

World War I brought the Ottoman Empire to an inglorious close. The Armenian genocide in 1915 destroyed part of the multinational system. The Arabs rebelled, supported by the British. The British also supported Zionist claims in Palestine. At the close of the war, only Turkey itself remained to the Ottomans.<sup>15</sup> In the wake of the Allied occupation of Turkey, Sultan Mohammed VI issued a proclamation on the mistreatment of Armenians. His

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<sup>13</sup> "Proclamation for the Ottoman Empire," *fordham.edu*, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1908youngturk.asp>. From "The Young Turks," trans. A. Sarrou, in *Civilization since Waterloo*, Rondo Cameron, ed. (Paris, 1912), pp. 40-42.

<sup>14</sup> George Gawrych, *The Young Ataturk: From Ottoman Soldier to Statesman of Turkey* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 20-21.

<sup>15</sup> Ansary, 292-8.

brief expression of regret was the dying gasp of multinational Ottoman government. The responsibility for the Armenian incident was laid at the door of “certain political committees.” The Sultan explained that investigations had been impossible immediately after the events, but that they were now being authorized. Tellingly, he says that “the mutual slaughter of sons of the same fatherland have broken my heart.” His statement affirms the position of mutual guilt that the modern Turkish government currently seems to affirm. By referring to Armenians as “sons of the same fatherland,” however, he attempts to preserve the multinational system that then was on the brink of collapse.<sup>16</sup>

The occupation of Turkey by the Entente powers set in motion the final dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and unintentionally the creation of the Republic of Turkey. National resistance to the Allies began to organize under the direction of army officers including Mustafa Kemal after the occupation began. When Greece sent an occupying force along with 120,000 colonists to Anatolia, guerilla resistance intensified. The arrival of Greek forces in Izmir provoked the beginning of a new war. With Istanbul under Allied control, Mustafa Kemal began to form a provisional government in Ankara. Set up in opposition to the sultan’s regime, Kemal’s government eventually became established as the Grand National Assembly.<sup>17</sup>

The Grand National Assembly was founded on April 23, 1920. The Republic of Turkey was officially established on October 29, 1923. Mustafa Kemal was reelected as president for the rest of his life. Under his leadership, Turkey underwent major reforms in an effort to modernize and secularize. In 1922, the Assembly formally abolished the Sultanate

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<sup>16</sup> Sultan Mohammed VI’s Proclamation of 6 December 1918,” *firstworldwar.com*, last modified August 22, 2009, [http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/mohammedvi\\_proclamation.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/mohammedvi_proclamation.htm). From *Source Records of the Great War, Vol. VI*, ed. Charles F. Horne, *National Alumni 1923*.

<sup>17</sup> Gawrych, 61-68, 81-84, 101-107.



and two years later the Caliphate followed. Turkey also abandoned the Islamic calendar in favor of the international one. In 1928, the Assembly adopted a new alphabet for Turkish.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the new Republic made surnames mandatory. Accordingly, Mustafa Kemal adopted the name Ataturk, the name by which he is primarily known today. The reforms cumulatively served to bring Turkey into Western modernity and to institute it as a secular nation-state. Ataturk hoped to foster a sense of “the Turkish nation [and] national sentiment... with human sentiment... not with religious sentiment.”<sup>19</sup> The Republic of Turkey, though by no means anti-Islamic, was founded on nationalistic rather than religious principles.

Since Ataturk’s time, Turkey has survived both internal and external conflicts. Three military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980 resolved in a return to democratic civilian government. The most recent coup saw the military participate in the deposition of an Islamist-leaning government in 1997. In 1974 it sent troops to Cyprus to keep it from going to Greece, resulting in the formation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Despite these conflicts, Turkey has remained engaged in European politics and alliances. It has been a member of the United Nations since 1945; and during the Cold War, it joined NATO. It achieved the status of associate member of the European Community later on, in 1964. In 2005, it began its ongoing bid to join the European Union.<sup>20</sup>

The current Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, has been a polarizing figure in Turkey. He has been a part of the Islamist movement in Turkey since his time as a college student. As such, he had numerous clashes with secularist authorities throughout his early career.

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<sup>18</sup> “Biography of Ataturk,” *kultur.gov*, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN,31350/biography-of-ataturk.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Gawrych, 214-15.

<sup>20</sup> “The World Factbook: Turkey,” *CIA*, accessed April 19, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>.

After his political party, the Justice and Development (AK) Party took power in 2002, Erdogan became prime minister. His primary supporters are conservative Muslims who opposed the previous governments' emphasis on secularization at the expense of religious expression. His primary opponents are secularists who fear imposition of a conservative social agenda at the expense of personal liberties.<sup>21</sup>

The most dramatic examples of his polarizing effect on Turkey are the Gezi Park protests of 2013. Originally the protests were sparked by government plans to destroy some trees in Gezi Park as part of a development project. Before long, the protests had expanded into general condemnation of the government. Latent issues boiled to the surface as sectors of the public reacted negatively to AK Party policies. These included a ban on alcohol sales past certain hours, an attempt to ban adultery, attempts to remove the ban on headscarves for women, and an attempt to ban kissing in public.<sup>22</sup> Turkish opinion has been split by Erdogan's social conservatism, and he has made as many enemies as he has friends. Though he once counted Gülen among his allies, their relationship has since turned hostile.<sup>23</sup> The Hizmet movement is considered the enemy within by the Erdogan administration, and Gülen has found it expedient to leave his homeland for safer shores.

According to his official website, Gülen was born in Anatolia, specifically in a village named Korucuk. In an interview, Gülen attributes his piety to the influence of older relatives including his grandparents and his father. His father taught him Persian and Arabic,

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<sup>21</sup> "Profile: Recep Tayyip Erdogan," *BBC*, last modified August 11, 2014, <http://m.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13746679>.

<sup>22</sup> "Q&A: Protests in Turkey," *BBC*, last modified June 12, 2013, <http://m.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22780773>.

<sup>23</sup> "Profile: Recep Tayyip Erdogan," *BBC*, last modified August 11, 2014, <http://m.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13746679>.

emphasizing the study of Mohammad and the Companions.<sup>24</sup> His mother directed his education until a school finally opened in his village. He studied Sufism in addition to receiving a more mainstream Islamic education. Rounding out his education, he studied Western philosophers including Camus, Sartre, and Marcuse.<sup>25</sup> Upon moving to Edirne later in life, he developed ascetic habits that landed him in a hospital for a couple of weeks.<sup>26</sup>

After living in Edirne, he went into military service in 1960. By then, he had gained a reputation as a teacher of Islam. He worked as a radio operator and felt some degree of guilt over his safe job: “They gave me a comfortable job: radio operator. As I was not fully fulfilling my military duty, I thought that the military’s food would not be halal (religiously lawful) for me.” He was still in the military during an attempted coup by Aydemir. After the coup was suppressed, he was transferred to Iskenderum and was encouraged to read Western classic thought by his commander. During a leave of absence he gave a seminar on Mevlana Rumi.<sup>27</sup> He returned to Edirne, then was transferred to Izmir. He gained popularity as a traveling preacher in the 70s, emphasizing a harmony between faith and intellect and an ethic of service to the nation. After another military coup, he was suspected of complicity and arrested. However, he was released after six months without being convicted. He gave talks on a broad swathe of issues, including the challenge of modern science to faith. A social movement developed around his teachings, expanding into education. Around three hundred

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<sup>24</sup> “A Different Home,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24650-a-different-home>.

<sup>25</sup> “Years of Education,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24652-years-of-education>.

<sup>26</sup> “Edirne,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24654-edirne>.

<sup>27</sup> “Military Service,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24655-military-service>.

educational institutions were founded by Hizmet.<sup>28</sup> Education has accordingly become a major focus of the movement. Rejecting the use of force, Gülen seeks to spread his teachings to a broader audience through persuasion. According to his website, “Gülen has synthesized the positive sciences with divinity, reconciling all ‘apparent’ differences between the two. In his writings and oral presentations, he brings the ideologies and philosophies of our part of the world and those of the West closer together.”<sup>29</sup>

Several themes emerge from the Hizmet account of Gülen’s life. The account portrays him as first being under the tutelage of holy men and then eventually becoming one himself. Gülen is upheld as a modern-day saint, a man without fault as far as Hizmet is concerned. For example, the website states that Gülen’s “deep desire to find solutions for contemporary social problems has resulted in gem-like sentences set one after another in his writings and speeches, like priceless pearls on a string.”<sup>30</sup> Another passage extols him as “a man of enthusiastic love and deep spirituality and, at the same time, of broad knowledge, comprehensive logic, discernment, and wisdom. The public knows Gülen as a man of insight and sagacity, clearness, softness and generosity, pain and pleading, dignity and piety, compassion, mercy and tolerance.”<sup>31</sup>

Another emergent theme is Gülen’s educational background and his value of tolerance. Having a strong Islamic education yet studying Western thought, he develops a vision of modernity that stresses education and interfaith dialogue. Hizmet accounts of

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<sup>28</sup> “Edirne, Kirklareli, and Finally Izmir,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001,

<http://www.fgulen.com/>

[en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24656-edirne-kirklareli-and-finally-izmir](http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24656-edirne-kirklareli-and-finally-izmir).

<sup>29</sup> “Further Remarks,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24657-further-remarks>.

<sup>30</sup> “Further Remarks,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24657-further-remarks>.

<sup>31</sup> “Years of Education,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24652-years-of-education>.

Gülen's life stress his interfaith activities. He wrote a paper on "The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue," which was submitted to the Parliament of the World's Religions. An organization called the Journalists and Writers Foundation was founded with his assistance for the purpose of advancing intra-societal understanding. Various Christian leaders, including Pope John Paul II in 1998, have met with Gülen to advance the cause of interfaith dialogue.<sup>32</sup>

The Hizmet movement walks a fine line in Turkish national politics and discourse. On the one hand, it seeks a transformative and all-encompassing role for religion in people's lives. However, it also seeks to promote tolerance and dialogue with other points of view. While theoretically supportive of socially conservative Muslim government, it has serious grievances with the current government of Recep Erdogan. It has attracted millions of followers, including people in influential positions. However, it also insists that it has no political aspirations. Even setting current politics aside, Hizmet faces tensions with Turkish national discourse. Ever since World War I and Ataturk, Turkish government has been institutionally secular. Hizmet, though ostensibly apolitical, tends to find support among conservative Muslims who would like to see some rollback of secularism.

This leads to questions that face not only Turkey but the modern world in general. Gülen, in his writings, claims to have a message that is universal. His followers believe that both the Islamic world and the West can benefit from his teachings. The movement is addressed almost as much to outsiders as it is to Muslims. His emphasis on interfaith dialogue and his studies of Western thought make it clear that this is not a movement addressed only to Turkey. Hizmet claims to have the Islamic answer to modernity.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, x.

Modernity, in all the nuances of the word, poses one of the greatest perceived challenges to religion. People of various faiths grapple with similar questions. Can one be modern and religious at the same time? Can one live by faith without being anti-intellectual? Can religious values be expressed in the public sphere, or must they be kept private? Should religious values be imposed on society at large, or only on those who voluntarily espouse them? Does science preclude spirituality? Islam, like every other world religion, is divided among groups who answer these questions in different ways.

While no religion is exempt from the questions posed by modernity, Muslims face some unique historical issues. In his book *Destiny Disrupted*, Tamim Ansary makes the argument that history, in a sense, has gone wrong for Muslims. The rise of Islam makes theological sense, as does the Golden Age that saw a flourishing of learning and progress in the Middle East. Early Islamic civilization has been memorialized by many Muslims as a quasi-utopian social order. The dramatic expansion of this social order at the expense of the Byzantines helped to prove its worth as opposed to the systems put in place by other empires. A later era of unparalleled prosperity under the Abbasids helped reinforce this sense of civilizational accomplishment. The city of Baghdad became a legendarily wealthy center of civilization.<sup>33</sup>

The first great external crisis faced by Islamic civilizations was the Mongol invasion. In 1258, the Mongols sacked Baghdad, wrapped the khalifa and his family in carpets, and kicked them until they died.<sup>34</sup> This defeat of civilization at the hands of irreligious barbarians was disastrous for Muslims, not only materially but also theologically. Some ascribed this defeat to a departure from true Islam. Salafism (and modern Islamist

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<sup>33</sup> Ansary, 47-8, 87-9.

<sup>34</sup> Ansary, 133, 150-6.

philosophies) developed out of this school of thought.<sup>35</sup> Another reaction was the development of Sufism. Sufism emphasized mysticism and the role of holy men who could lead people to greater communion with God and each other. The Ottoman Empire, at its inception, was steeped in Sufi teaching.<sup>36</sup> Sufism, rather than Salafism, is the theological tradition that Fethullah Gülen inherits.

Toward the end of the Ottoman Empire, Europe was beginning to pose an even greater threat to Islamic civilization than the Mongols had. European colonization of the Islamic world put Muslims in a new crisis of existence in which “the challenge to Islam came not so much from Christianity as from a secular, humanistic worldview that evolved from the Reformation, the *mélange* now often called modernity.”<sup>37</sup> Ansary divides Muslim responses to modernity into three basic categories. One, in the Salafi tradition, sought to purify the Muslim community to return to the true *Umma*. Another was to assimilate with Western thought, updating Islam to match the times. Finally, a sort of middle ground sought to adopt Western science while retaining Islamic faith.<sup>38</sup>

Hizmet clearly seeks to take the middle ground, with some important caveats. Gülen endorses modern science, and he promotes supposedly Western values such as “Love and Tolerance,” the title of one of his many books. He blames the tension between religion and science primarily on the Catholic Church and its medieval opposition to scientific discovery.<sup>39</sup> The Gülenist movement perceives this separation of science and religion as dangerous. It allows science to proceed in immoral directions, with results like the creation of weapons of mass destruction. It also gave Europe the brute strength necessary for

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<sup>35</sup> Ansary, 160-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ansary, 164-8, 168-72.

<sup>37</sup> Ansary, 249-250.

<sup>38</sup> Ansary, 252.

<sup>39</sup> *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, 17.

colonialism and the spread of materialistic modernity. However, Gülenists propose that science and modern technology can be used as an expression of religion.<sup>40</sup>

Hizmet does not simply accept modernity as it is. Rejecting the fatalism typically ascribed to Muslims by Westerners, Gülen takes the more optimistic view that the future will be what we make it. “Thus, according to the Qur’an, we are the ones who make history, not a compelling Divine Will.”<sup>41</sup> Given this chance to change the future, Gülen believes that Muslims can and should create a new kind of modernity. In Gülen’s modernity, science would be an expression of religion, just as the material world is an expression of God’s knowledge and power.<sup>42</sup> “All knowledge belongs to God and religion is from God. How then can the two be in conflict?”<sup>43</sup> Science would also be open to the possibility of spiritual and paranormal phenomena such as telepathy, prophecy, predictive dreams, and the activities of jinn. The new modernity would be willing and able to harness these phenomena for good; using jinn, for example, in communications, security, mining, metal-work, space studies, and history. People might become more open to seeing spiritual activity affecting the material world, for example in evil spirits causing mental illnesses. Prayer could be regularly used in healing. “When science finally accepts the existence of the metaphysical realm and the influence of metaphysical forces, its practitioners will be able to remove many obstructions and make far greater advances and fewer mistakes.”<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, the goal for Hizmet is to bring about a global civilization united under the new modernity. Gülen “envisions a twenty-first century in which we shall witness the

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<sup>40</sup> “The Physical, Historical, and Sociological Background,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/1304-biography/24649-the-physical-historical-and-sociological-background>.

<sup>41</sup> *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, 128.

<sup>42</sup> *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, 97.

<sup>43</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (Clifton: Tughra Books, 2011), xxi.

<sup>44</sup> *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, 58-60, 72-3.



sprouting of a spiritual dynamic that will revive the now-dormant moral values. He envisions an age of tolerance and understanding that will lead to cooperation among civilizations and their ultimate fusion into one body. The human spirit shall triumph in the form of an intercivilizational dialogue and a sharing of values.”<sup>45</sup> This unification, however, is to be achieved through peaceful dialogue rather than through violent conquest. Persuasion, and persuasion alone, is the way forward in the modern era.<sup>46</sup> Violence and terrorism are, according to Gülen, intrinsically antithetical to the Islamic faith. “No terrorist can be a Muslim, and no real Muslim can be a terrorist.”<sup>47</sup> Gülen holds that the world can one day unite under an Islamic modernity, to the benefit of all.

The Gülenist movement is a significant, but not isolated, historical development. It has arisen in modern Turkey as a response to twenty-first century secularism and materialism. Gülen is bringing the Sufi tradition into the modern era. He is regarded as a twenty-first century saint and holy man in the tradition of Sufi leaders. Rejecting the more violent methods of propagation open to certain versions of Salafism, Gülen focuses on creating a better community that will attract new converts through love and piety. Interfaith dialogue is crucial to his hopes for the future, and through these efforts he hopes to redefine modernity and redeem it from secular materialism. Nevertheless, the movement faces major challenges. Few Western scientists are going to be open to the spiritual phenomena Gülen’s modernity asks them to acknowledge. It would be difficult, for example, to imagine a European research university funding a project to harness jinn in communications technology. Within Turkey itself, the movement has attracted the suspicion and persecution

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<sup>45</sup> “Further Remarks,” *fgulen.com*, last modified September 15, 2001, <http://www.fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life/about-fethullah-gulen/biography/24657-further-remarks>.

<sup>46</sup> *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, viii.

<sup>47</sup> *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 261.

of Prime Minister Erdogan's government. The movement's ambitions, though allegedly apolitical, do not sit well with the Turkish authorities.

Yet with millions of followers and an international audience, Hizmet will not be easy for the Turkish government to shut down. To its followers, it promises a reconciliation between Islam and modernity, accomplished in such a way that Islam is left uncompromised and modernity is improved and humanized. To members of other faiths, it offers peaceful dialogue and coexistence. Hizmet may prove to be one of the more important Islamic movements of our time. Then again, only time itself will tell.

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