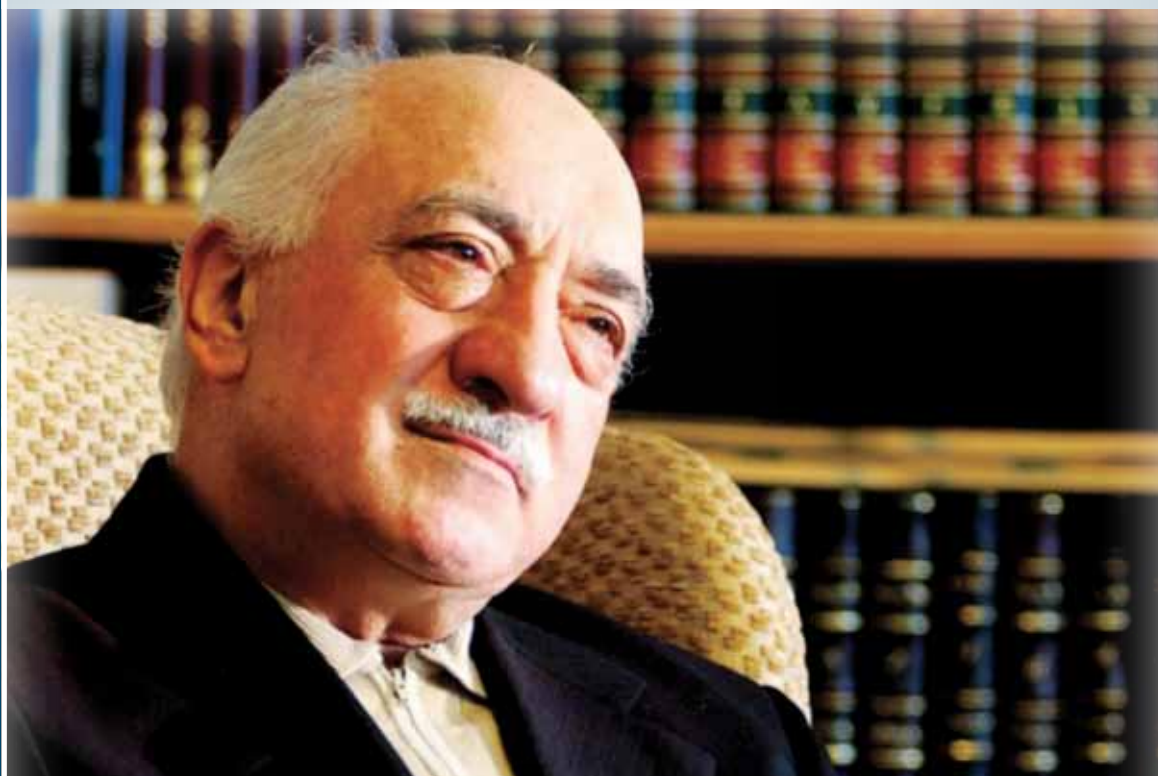


# FETHULLAH GÜLEN & THE HİZMET MOVEMENT



FETHULLAH GÜLEN CHAIR  
FOR INTERCULTURAL STUDIES

KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT  
**LEUVEN**

# Preface

**M**uslim presence has already been a reality in our contemporary European society. This presence, however, invokes many questions and the encounters are not always positive. Our challenge, hence, is now to explore and develop new ways of living cohesively together in peace. Overcoming this challenge is not a straightforward process and needs a mutual engagement. A bridge-building approach should be given a top priority and this approach should seek an inclusive and constructive interaction to heal antagonistic feelings.

The Fethullah Gülen Chair for Intercultural Studies established at the Catholic University of Leuven (K.U. Leuven) is indeed a concrete step towards developing such a kind of approach. As its name indicates, the inspiration comes from Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish-Muslim scholar who is regarded by many as a real bridge builder.

As an intellectual and spiritual leader, Fethullah Gülen has encouraged his Muslim fellows to take initiatives to build bridges particularly between Islam and West, tradition and modernity, science and spirituality, reason and faith. He has motivated millions to engage and invest in sustaining peace and improving community relations through non-denominational education and intercultural dialogue. His recognition of democracy as the only viable political system of governance and his emphasis on diversity, equal access to human rights, freedom of belief for all, loyalty to the law of the land and the non-instrumentalisation of religion in politics make his message one of the most promising calls for the future of the relations between the West and Muslim community. His message has now a growing influence particularly among the second-generation migrant-origin citizens of Europe.

It is our hope that this chair, inspired by this message, will contribute to the bridge-building process through promoting intercultural understanding and stimulating research on relations between Muslim communities and the wider society in Belgium and Europe.

I hope that this booklet helps for those who would like to have a better understanding of the inspiration behind the chair and the movement affiliated with this inspiration.

Prof. Johan Leman  
Chairholder

# Who's Fethullah Gülen?

**F**ethullah Gülen is a Turkish-Muslim scholar, opinion leader and education activist. He is a preacher by profession and worked as a state-licensed preacher in Turkey between 1959 and 1981. He is regarded as the initiator and inspirer of the transnational faith-inspired civil society movement generally referred to as the “Hizmet Movement” or the “Gülen Movement”<sup>1</sup>.

He has motivated millions to engage and invest in sustaining peace and improving community relations through non-denominational education and intercultural dialogue. He is respected by many as a living model of devotion, piety and altruism. Gülen is considered one of the most influential intellectuals not only in modern Turkey but in today's world. In July 2008, he was selected as the top public intellectual from among a hundred candidates by the Foreign Policy and Prospect magazines. Gülen, however, considers himself only a volunteer of the civil movement he has inspired and defines his role as an ‘adviser’ or ‘motivator’ at most.

## BRIEF BIOGRAPHY & EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Gülen was born in Erzurum, Turkey in 1941. The milieu in which he was brought up was religiously conservative and had a strong and vivid spiritual tradition. At a time when official public education was still limited and classical-religious education was banned in Turkey's early republican era, Gülen, like many others, received his education in non-official study circles



*Gülen is considered one of the most influential intellectuals in the world*

<sup>1</sup> Gülen himself does not approve of this phrase and prefers to call it as “Movement of Volunteers” or “Hizmet Movement”



*Gülen giving a public lecture in Izmir in 1975*

carried on by former madrasa<sup>2</sup> academics. He was trained in the Islamic sciences in these circles under the tutelage of renowned scholars and spiritual masters around his hometown. His religious education consisted of studies in classical Islamic disciplines such as Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), prophetic tradition (hadith), jurisprudence (fiqh), Arabic and Persian, as well as Islamic spirituality (known as Sufism in the West). As a student keen to seek knowledge, he completed his madrasa education within a relatively short time, but he never had an opportunity to receive an official education. Later, however, he obtained his diploma by passing the required exams through self-tutelage. In the course of his life, alongside his study of Islam, he focused on educating himself in natural sciences, philosophy, literature and history from both Eastern and Western traditions. It was this broad-ranged attitude that equipped him for his well-known comprehensive discourse.

Gülen began preaching at a relatively young age. In 1959, he passed an exam administered by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) of Turkey and was awarded a state preacher license. He then officially began to preach in Edirne. At the age of twenty-eight, he was promoted to a post in Izmir<sup>3</sup>, the largest province of the west coast of Turkey, where Gülen's outstanding discourse began to crystallize and his audience to expand. He was then appointed to posts in a number of different cities within the western part of Turkey as an official imam and preacher. Meanwhile, Gülen was also travelling around many cities in Turkey and in some European countries to give sermons in mosques and speeches at gatherings in various locations including theatres and coffee houses. Though he officially retired from preaching in 1981, Gülen, as a preacher emeritus, gave his most celebrated series of sermons between 1988 and 1991 in the biggest mosques of the country where thousands of people were present to listen to him. Due to health concerns, he terminated his public preaching in 1991 but he continued to hold small conversation circles which often consisted of his answering questions from the audience.

His speeches did not focus exclusively on religious texts but included a broad array of such topics as science, history, modern philosophy, social justice, human rights, moral values and education. He also expanded the function of the mosque by launching a Q&A series in which he responded to people's concerns and curiosities, including those regarding the challenges of modern times. Gülen's preaching style and discourse have particularly attracted the attention of college students and ordinary people all around Turkey. Particularly, during the years of political turmoil in Turkey, he witnessed many young people's attraction to extremist ideolo-



*Besides sermons in mosques, Gülen travelled to numerous cities across Turkey to give speeches at various public places, including theatres and even coffee houses*

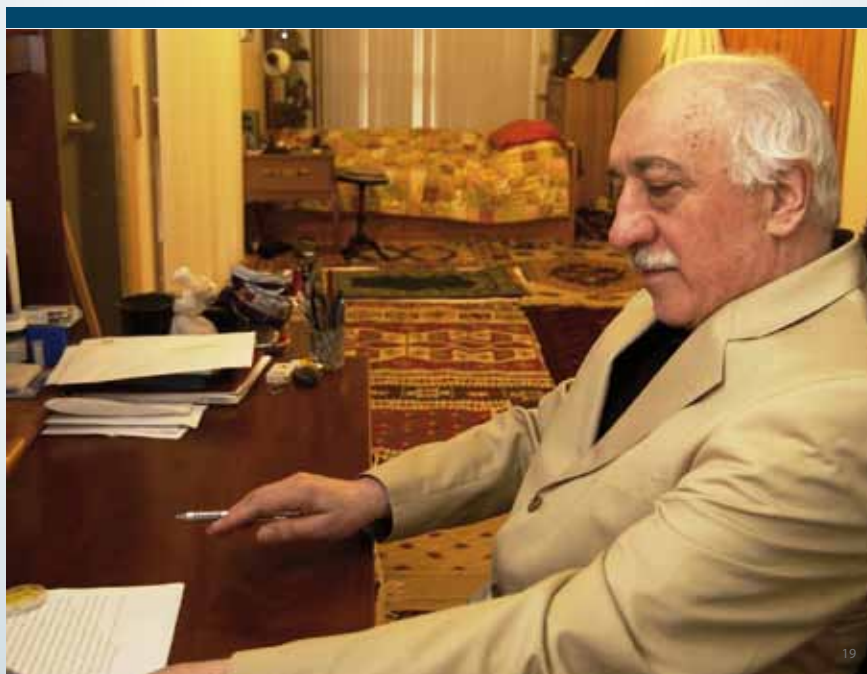
<sup>2</sup> Madrasas in the Ottoman Empire used to be higher education institutions offering a wide range of studies. They were similar to present day universities; however they particularly aimed to consolidate Islamic practices and theories.

<sup>3</sup> Both Edirne and Izmir are recognized in Turkey as multi-cultural cities that have been the most influenced by the Westernization process.



gies via the violent polarization of socialism and nationalism. He strove to inspire the Turkish youth and lead them toward an apolitical way of service to society, based on a peaceful lifestyle. His speeches were recorded and embraced throughout the country. As he frankly states, he intended to cultivate this public interest to channel good intentions and devotional energy towards a positive end.

In 1999, Gülen moved to the U.S to receive medical care for his diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. He underwent a heart operation in 2004. Upon the recommendation of his doctors, he chose to stay away from the politically charged atmosphere in Turkey, particularly after the military memorandum in 1997 (usually referred as a “post-modern coup”) and he was granted permanent residency by the US government. He currently lives at a retreat facility in Pennsylvania together with a group of students and scholars. He receives a few visitors as his health permits. He spends most of his time reading, writing, editing, praying, and receiving medical care.



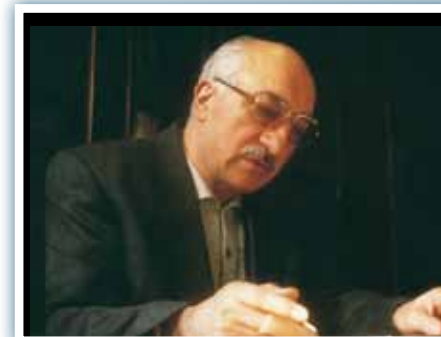
*Gülen in his room at the retreat facility in Pennsylvania*

## *Significance*

**F**ethullah Gülen has emerged as one of the most interesting and prominent public figures in contemporary Turkey. Through appealing ideas and perspectives and a lifelong dedication to altruistic service he has had the ability to transform the mindset and attitude of the public. The following is a brief presentation of the salient features of Gülen, his ideas and his social activism.

### **A - GÜLEN AS A MUSLIM SCHOLAR AND INTELLECTUAL**

Fethullah Gülen is, first and foremost, a Muslim scholar with expertise in various Islamic disciplines. He represents a living model of the traditional alim<sup>4</sup> profile. He has a sound knowledge of both classical and contemporary interpretations and discussions by Muslim scholars. Al-Ghazali (d.1111), Jalaladdin er-Rumi (d.1273), Yunus Emre(d.1321), Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1624), and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d.1960) are perhaps those who have had the most impact on his intellectual life and his interpretation of Islam. He also often quotes from the classical Persian poets like Molla Cami, Hafez Shirazi, Anwari, Saadi and Firdausi. However, Gülen is also well-read in European philosophy and literature. He is able to converse with the latter comfortably through his writings and addresses<sup>5</sup>. He has, moreover, a commanding knowledge of modern science and embraces knowledge that encourages the pursuit of scientific and technological advance.



*Gülen is a prolific writer who has authored more than 50 books*

Fethullah Gülen is a prolific writer. He has authored more than 50 books and many articles on a variety of topics. He contributes to a number of journals and magazines. He writes the lead article for the magazines Fountain, Yeni Ümit, Sızıntı, and Yağmur which are published by companies sympathetic to his ideas. In addition to printed publications, his ideas are accessible to an increasing population through radio and TV networks and websites<sup>6</sup> sympathetic to his views.

<sup>4</sup> Alim is an Arabic word that basically means “religious scholar”. It refers, in Islamic tradition, to a scholar who is simultaneously well versed in several fields of Islamic sciences as well as in some other disciplines. Alim is moreover regarded as an intellectual and spiritual leader exemplifying how Islam ought to be lived in a given context. For more on Gülen and alim tradition, see Ergene (2008) and Bulaç (2007)

<sup>5</sup> For instance, W. Shakespeare, H. Balzac, E. Zola, J.W. Goethe, F.Y. Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Pushkin, Voltaire, I. Kant, Descartes, J.J. Rousseau, B. Russell, A. Camus and J.P. Sartre are among the Western authors and philosophers whose ideas and writings have been particularly explored and reflected upon by Gülen.

<sup>6</sup> His most recent speeches are being published through the website [www.herkul.org](http://www.herkul.org)

His readership in Turkey is estimated at several million. His influence outside the country is also growing as his work has been translated into many languages. His works are now available in many European languages and others including Arabic, Urdu, Malay, Indonesian and Russian.

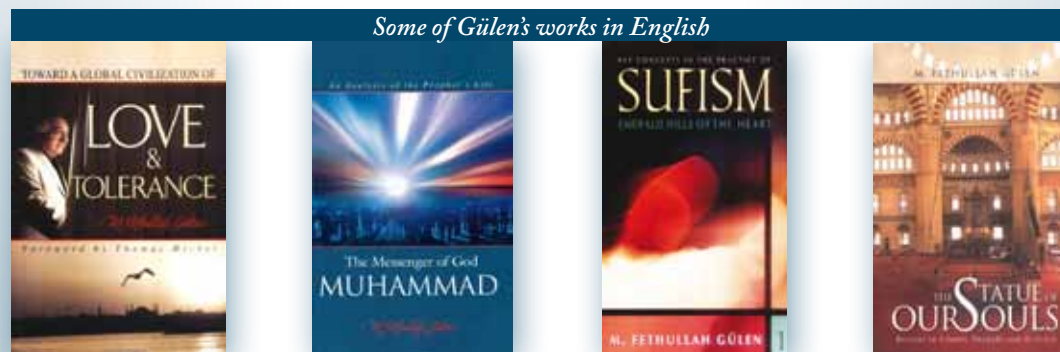
## B - GÜLEN AND CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

While Fethullah Gülen's understanding of Islam is rooted in Sunni orthodoxy, he communicates a non-contentious, universal, Sufi-oriented and human-centered interpretation of Islam. Rather than promoting a Reformation in Islam, he advocates re-reflection on normative religious sources with a fresh look acknowledging the needs of the present age. In this process, reasoning should play a pivotal role; and a holistic, inclusive and dynamic approach should supersede the exclusivist, literal and legalistic one.

Owing in part to his early exposure to and acquaintance with Islamic spirituality (i.e. Sufism), Gülen is known for his consistent emphasis on the spiritual dimension of Islam. His teaching disapproves of proselytism and the oppressive practice of faith since they are, according to him, contrary to the very nature of faith itself. This is also why he has consistently disavored the attempts to turn religion into a political ideology, more specifically so-called 'political Islam'.

One of the main concerns of Gülen has been to seek solutions to overcome the tremendous sense of strain, alienation, defeat and disintegration felt by Muslims for over two centuries. Gülen highlights the need for Muslims to feel at home in the modern world through education, self-criticism and understanding. This will in turn provide them with the privilege of being contributors to the world community. This contribution, he points out, should take place in a civil framework that promotes:

- constant positive action that leaves no room for fighting and anarchy
- activities that contribute to social and community cohesion
- absence of material or worldly expectations in return
- actions based on moral virtues that build trust and confidence
- involvement in constructive and action-oriented work rather than creating conflict or being reactive.



## C - PUBLIC STANCE AGAINST VIOLENCE

Gülen has been recognized for his consistent stance against the use of violence with religious rhetoric.

He was among the first Muslim scholars who publicly condemned the 9/11 attacks by a statement published in the New York Times and the Washington Post on Sept 12 and Sept 21, 2001 respectively. He was again the first Muslim scholar who rebuked the Beslan massacres by Chechen rebels in 2004. He has given interviews to Turkish, American, Italian, Canadian, Russian, Kenyan, Bulgarian, and Japanese newspapers in which he categorically condemned the use of political, ideological and religious reasons to justify acts of terror. He has appeared on numerous national television programs publicly condemning such acts. He also helped publish a scholarly book<sup>7</sup> on the Islamic perspective on terror and suicide attacks, condemning such attacks on humanitarian and religious grounds. Gülen did not express his views on terrorism only to Western readers but voiced them in mosque sermons with congregations of thousands of Muslims. Some of his anti-terror statements were even made long before the 9/11 tragedy. For instance, he publicly denounced Saddam Hussein's firing rockets on Israeli cities and he unequivocally rejected suicide bombings in the Holy Land.

### The Washington Post

*We condemn in the strongest of terms the latest terrorist attack on the United States of America, and feel the pain of the American people at the bottom of our hearts.*

*Islam abhors such acts of terror. A religion that professes, "He who unjustly kills one man kills the whole of humanity," cannot condone senseless killing of thousands.*

*Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and their loved ones.*

Fethullah Gülen  
Honorary Chairman  
Journalists and Writers Foundation,  
Turkey

*Gülen's message to condemn  
9/11 terrorist attacks on  
21 September 2001*

Gülen reiterates in his speeches and sermons that peace, justice and stability are of the utmost significance to Islam. He opposes the use of violence to achieve vested political interests. Gülen sees terror as a crime against humanity and he affirms the Qur'anic and the Biblical view that killing one person is like massacring all humanity. Unlike some who seek religious justification for terrorist methods and suicide bombings, Fethullah Gülen boldly declares that "it is hard for a person to remain a Muslim if he becomes involved in terrorism. Islam does not approve of killing people in order to attain a goal. One cannot achieve Heaven by murdering another person."<sup>8</sup>

## D - PRO-DEMOCRACY APPROACH

Gülen recognizes democracy as the only viable political system of governance. He argues that "humankind has not yet designed a better governing system than democracy despite its some shortcomings<sup>9</sup>". Democracy, he affirms, is a process of no return that evolves and improves, and people should strive to modernize and consolidate democratic institutions in order to have a society where individual rights and freedoms are respected and protected. He has underlined many times the compatibility of Islam with a true democracy.

<sup>7</sup> Çapan (ed) (2004)

<sup>8</sup> Akman (2004)

<sup>9</sup> Yilmaz (2003), p. 224





During 90's Gülen often met with prominent figures including artists and journalists to promote mutual understanding in Turkish society

In his view,

*"Islam, while inviting people to live the divine message, does not offer a certain type or a detailed form of a political regime, state or administrative system. Islam, first and foremost, targets spiritual perfection at individual level and common good (islah) at societal level. It leaves the political-administrative preferences to the free wills and choice of people. In Islam, the power is formed by people's free declaration of will, which they themselves deserve. Islam, while granting the right to practice one's belief, leaves also the right to believe or not to the free choice of a person. What Islam intends is a perfect application of religious freedom for all."*<sup>10</sup>

This is why Gülen denounces transforming religion into a political ideology while encouraging all citizens to play an informed and responsible part in political life of their country. This is also why he is very critical of the, supposedly, Islamic regimes that are state-determined and limited to sectarian approval" in contemporary Muslim world<sup>11</sup>. Gülen has been recognized for consistent disapproval of the Islamist movements and revolutions of "political Islam". He was, for instance, harshly criticized by political Islamist groups in Turkey when he declared in 1994 that "it won't be possible to reverse the process of democracy"

## E - A MUSLIM PIONEER IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Gülen has emerged as one of the most persuasive and influential voices in the Muslim community calling for dialogue as a step towards universal peace<sup>12</sup>. Gülen has pioneered a rejuvenation of the inter-faith dialogue spirit in the Islamic tradition, which was forgotten amidst the troubled years of the early twentieth century. Gülen recalls dynamics that are already embedded within the Qur'an and age-old Muslim tradition and he tries "to build a convincing argument that tolerance, love, dialogue and compassion are genuinely Islamic values that Muslims have a duty to bring to the modern world<sup>13</sup>". Hence, Gülen insists that the interfaith approach is a must today and this is not only required by the pressing realities of our age but also by the very source of Islam. By tolerance and dialogue Gülen understands embracing people regardless of

<sup>10</sup> Izvetsiya (2009)

<sup>11</sup> Ünal & Williams (2000), p.151

<sup>12</sup> Weekly Cutting Edge, June 21, 2008

<sup>13</sup> Michel (2004), p.i



Gülen with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew in 1996

differences in opinion, world-view, ethnicity or faith. There is a need to recognize that differences do exist and the objective is not to "correct" but to hear and listen to the other side<sup>14</sup>. For him, "what people have in common is far greater than what divides and separates them." Moreover, he communicates that "we are first human beings and then Muslims."

His promotion of such a spirit resulted in the creation of The Foundation of Journalists and Writers (JWF) in 1994, of which Gülen is still the honorary president. As an influential NGO in current Turkey, the JWF has taken various initiatives that have been considered the first of their kind in Turkey. It has organized a series of gatherings involving leaders of religious minorities in Turkey such as the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Armenian Patriarch, the Chief Rabbi of Turkey and representatives of the Catholic Church in Turkey. Therefore in Turkey, Gülen has been credited for bringing about a positive atmosphere in relationships between the Muslim majority and non-Muslim minorities in the country which has experienced many difficulties for many decades in this area.

The JWF also initiated the 'Abant Platforms', the forums that have brought together leading intellectuals in Turkey who hold different, even conflicting, world views and who would, until recently, never have imagined gathering together. The Abant Platforms have, in particular, been widely appreciated as an effective forum for airing dilemmas that many people in Turkish society long to have openly discussed and resolved<sup>15</sup>.



Gülen with Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi Doron in 1999

Fethullah Gülen's efforts for dialogue and better understanding were recognized by a private audience with the late Pope John Paul II in 1998. He has also met many leading figures in and outside Turkey, such as state dignitaries, authors, journalists, artists, businessmen and media leaders. His spirit of inclusivity has stretched, moreover, to embrace not only those of other faiths, but also to those of no faith. Gülen has not hesitated to meet and exchange views with people who are very critical about religion if not atheists.

Gülen's ideas and approaches have also inspired many outside Turkey to take initiatives in their local contexts to promote intercultural understating and empathic acceptance.

## F - EDUCATION AS A MEANS TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Perhaps the most striking feature of Gülen's life and work is the fact that his vision and ideas have not stopped at rhetoric but have instead been globally realized as civil projects. Among these projects, the most remarkable ones are the educational institutions that have been established in different parts of the world. During his preaching years in different contexts

<sup>14</sup> Weekly Cutting Edge, June 21, 2008

<sup>15</sup> Cetin (2010), p.62



## MEETING WITH THE POPE

*Fethullah Gülen met with the late Pope John Paul II on February 9th 1998 in Rome. This meeting was regarded as a notable response from the Muslim side to the call of the “Nostra Aetate” declaration of the Second Vatican Council intended to develop better relations with other faiths. At that meeting, Gülen proposed to the Pope:*

- *to have a joint visit in 2000 to the Anatolian cities Antioch, Ephesus, Tarsus where the Christian tradition had first rooted,*
- *to hold conference series in world capitals where religious leaders can participate,*
- *to establish an inter-faith faculty of theology in Urfa/Turkey for students from three Abrahamic traditions.*
- *to have a joint visit to Jerusalem, as a first step to open this holy city to visa-free visits for Christians, Muslims and Jews*

*The meeting of Gülen with the Pope has aroused much criticism in Turkey and this was not always fair. Gülen has been harshly criticized, on the one hand, by religiously conservative people claiming that Gülen had been authorized by the Pope to Christianize the country; he was attacked by the secularist elite, on the other hand, for allegedly collaborating with the Pope to undermine the secular structure of the country and transform Turkey into a theocratic state.*



*Gülen with late Pope John Paul II in Rome in 1998*



*Pupils at ISIK School in Arbil/Northern Iraq*

throughout Turkey, Fethullah Gülen continuously emphasized that peace, social justice and respect for diverse cultures and faiths can be achieved by educated individuals who are grounded in modern science, strong morality and practical altruism. For him, education should not be limited to formal instruction but should address comprehensively the spiritual, intellectual and physical dimensions of our beings. He has therefore encouraged his audience to establish non-confessional schools, rather than religious schools or mosques, which would combine the best state-of-the-art scientific training with character education.

These educational institutions are now operating in more than one hundred countries and comprise primary and secondary schools, universities, language schools, kindergartens and tutorial centres. Notable examples of such schools include those in Turkey, Central Asia, Africa, the Far East and Eastern Europe. Regardless of their location, these schools exemplify harmonious interfaith and intercultural relationships, successful combination of spirituality and science, and philanthropic dedication for the sake of humanity. They also improve access to quality education, notably for women<sup>16</sup>. In conflict-ridden regions such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Bosnia-Herzegovina, southeast Turkey and northern Iraq, these institutions are known to increase educational opportunities and contribute to communal cohesion, which in turn decreases the appeal of terrorist groups operating in these countries with exclusivist agendas. In addition to contributing to social harmony, these schools have been recognized for their success in international science competitions.

Fethullah Gülen does not run or own any schools. These schools have been established by educational companies or foundations founded for this purpose. Some of them are joint ventures with host countries. Each school is an independently-run institution and mainly sponsored by local entrepreneurs along with altruistic educators and dedicated parents. The tripartite relationship i.e. parents, educators/teachers and sponsors, is regarded as a distinctive feature of these schools. Although the inspiration to get involved in education comes from Fethullah Gülen, the curriculum and management of the schools are left to the educators who take their decisions in compliance with the educational system of the host countries. These schools adhere consistently to a secular curriculum and they communicate universal human values rather

<sup>16</sup> Mohamed (2007), p.555



*Gülen-inspired Fatih High School in Istanbul established in 1982*

### *Gülen-inspired schools in some conflict-ridden regions*



*Fountain School in The Philippines*



*Sema School in Bosnia-Herzegovina*



*Pakturk School in Pakistan*



# The Hizmet Movement

than any confessional instruction.

The Hizmet Movement is a world-wide civic initiative rooted in the spiritual and humanistic tradition of Islam and inspired by the ideas and activism of Fethullah Gülen. It is a faith-based, cultural and educational movement that focuses the betterment of the individual toward a positive change in society. The movement is distinguished for its support of democracy, its openness to globalization, its progressiveness in integrating tradition with modernity, and its humanistic outlook. The participants of the movement often refer to it as “Hizmet” which could be translated as “voluntary service”. Gülen describes it as “a movement of people united around high human values” and disapproves of the attribution of the movement to his name.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE MOVEMENT

Fethullah Gülen has always been acknowledged as an “unusual preacher” by his audience. His preaching style, altruistic social activism and ascetic lifestyle have attracted many people from all walks of life in his native country. His sermons and speeches have been recorded in audiotapes from his early years of preaching. These recorded sermons have been enthusiastically embraced, extending the reach of his ideas, message and vision.

Gülen’s initial audience in Izmir became the seed of a faith-based community. This community, at the outset, consisted mainly of college students and owners of small and medium enterprises in Izmir and around. This small community then began to invest in education through student dormitories, tutorial centers and secondary schools. The community later expanded to encompass citizens from very different backgrounds, including non-Muslims who share the humanistic dimension of Gülen’s vision if not its Islamic roots. Since the early 2000s, the mo-



*Yamanlar High School, the first school established by Gülen-inspired people in Izmir*

vement has gained a more transnational character.

The ever-expanding public response to Gülen’s message has ultimately culminated in a social phenomenon which would be better described as a “faith-inspired civil movement” than as a “community”. The contribution of the people supporting this movement has in time crystallized not only in educational institutions (i.e. tutoring centers, primary and secondary schools, universities) but also in community centres, cultural organizations, publishing houses, media institutions, professional and trade networks, hospitals and relief organizations both in Turkey and abroad. To put it differently, the phenomenon that is known today as the “Hizmet Movement” has evolved from a local faith-based community to a transnational faith-inspired civil society movement over the last four decades. This movement is today recognised as one of the most dynamic faith-inspired movements originating in the Muslim world.



*One of the tutoring centres in multi-ethnic province Mardin, in South-Eastern Turkey*

## GOALS AND NATURE

The participants in the movement have faith that any type of service to humanity can be a way of seeking the good pleasure (rida) of God, which is, they believe, the ultimate goal of Muslim life. Within that framework, the objectives of the movement can be summarized as follows:

- Achieving the full potential of human beings through balancing mind with heart and inner endeavour with social activism
- Achieving the full potential of societies through shared human values, fundamental human rights and a sense of responsibility.
- Achieving peace and social cohesion through understanding and partnership

In order to attain these goals, the movement highlights empathic acceptance, respect, love, dialogue and friendship, consultation/deliberation, constructive action and volunteerism as its guiding principles.

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*Major media institutions founded by Gülen-inspired people*

The people supporting the movement, furthermore, consider ignorance, poverty and polarization as the main problems that must be addressed at the global level. The movement prioritizes involvement in education and media, sharing and cooperation for sustainable economic development and intercultural/interfaith dialogue respectively to tackle with these challenges.

The Hizmet Movement has consistently remained non-reactionary, non-confrontational,



inclusive and independent. It is neither an ideological nor a political movement. Political choices are left to individuals and there is no monolithic support for certain political leader or party among the participants. The movement, furthermore, categorically disapproves of the politicisation of religion in general and Islam in particular. It is a severe critic of political Islam and has never been an Islamist movement.

The spirituality of the Hizmet Movement resembles that of early Sufis<sup>17</sup> within the spiritual tradition of Islam who sought balance between inward and outward dimensions of faith, i.e. between rituals and spiritual purification. There are many Sufi elements in the teachings of Fethullah Gülen as he is himself inspired by several Sufi masters. However, the movement is not a Sufi brotherhood nor has it ever been a sect.

## ORGANIZATION AND FINANCING OF THE MOVEMENT

The bases of the movement are diverse service projects that are initiated, funded or conducted by people who are motivated to various extents by Gülen's humanitarian discourse. Though



*Volunteers of Kimse Yok Mu (Is Anybody There?), the major Gülen-inspired relief organisation, carrying food supplies in Bangladesh in 2008*

Fethullah Gülen is esteemed by his followers as "Hocaefendi", which means "respected teacher" in Turkish, he does not have a holy status. The movement does not have a central organization or formal membership. It is much more like a loosely-knit social network. This social network comprises many organizations and institutions that differ in the scope of their activity. They are independent of each other in financial and organizational terms, so the movement has no hierarchical structure. They mostly operate at the local level, and as quite frequently witnessed, people in this network do not all know each other. They establish project-based relationships as needed and sometimes collaborate on various aspects of their activities. All the establishments run by the participants of the Movement operate within the legal and political system in place and respect the legal framework of the relevant state.

The projects and organizations sponsored by the Hizmet movement are numerous, international and costly in terms of human and financial capital. Questions regarding the financing of these initiatives are periodically raised by critics of the movement and newcomers who are invited to Hizmet-related activities. While on occasion some people have raised the possibility of collusion with Middle Eastern governments, others are suspicious that Western government agencies are financially backing the projects. Aware of these criticisms, Gülen recently indicated that a priority must be proactive financial transparency.<sup>18</sup>

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Fethullah Gülen has never had personal wealth to be able to sponsor projects himself. He has, instead, appeared at many fund-raising dinners and visited individuals to try to convince

<sup>17</sup> Early Sufis represent the non-institutionalized form of Islamic spirituality that effectively seeks the internalization of Islam through a simple ascetic life style.

<sup>18</sup> Ebaugh & Koc (2007), p.540

them to give support. In time, businessmen and entrepreneurs committed to the ideas and vision promoted by Gülen began to establish local circles to discuss how his ideals could be applied in their local communities. Along with businessmen these circles also include many other individuals who would like to contribute to the Gülen-inspired projects. These numerous local circles are indeed largely responsible for keeping the wheels turning financially for the initiatives undertaken by the movement<sup>19</sup>. These circles are responsible for managing and overseeing the financial resources received. Each institution has its own independent accounting system and is accountable to the local and state authorities as well as to the institution's sponsors. Along with the fund-raising dinners held by these circles, various projects are sponsored by Turkish or local entrepreneurs and organizations through in-kind donations, charitable contributions and underwriting.

In order to fully understand the financial structure and operation of the Hizmet Movement, it is imperative to take into consideration cultural-religious practices relating to philanthropy and charity in Turkish society and some Islamic concepts pertaining to a believer's financial duties. The Hizmet Movement is recognised for its success in construing charity in Islam in a modern and refreshing way; and in convincing Muslim believers to perform their financial duties in such a manner that they constructively contribute to the well-being of all.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the altruistic spirit of the participants and the acceptance of volunteerism as a key principle by them, help to undertake many projects below its market costs with due respect to the labour concerns and rights. It is evident that the contribution of participants in the movement includes not only financial giving but also sacrifices of time and energy, and intellectual and physical efforts.



*Panel discussion and whirling dervishes organised by Gülen-inspired Intercultural Dialogue Platform (IDP) at the European Parliament in 2007*

<sup>19</sup> For more on the structure of these circles and their financial function for the movement, see Ebaugh (2010)

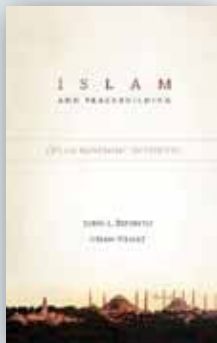
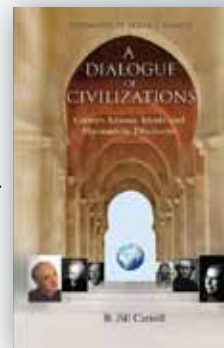
<sup>20</sup> For an explanation of these concepts and practices and how they are re-interpreted within the movement see again Ebaugh (2010)

# Literature on the Hizmet Movement



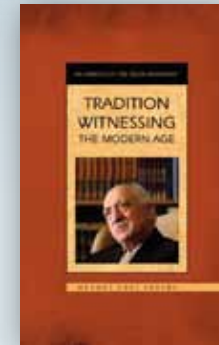
**The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam** by Helen Rose Ebaugh — Based on interview data and visits to Gülen-inspired institutions, the book describes the movement from a sociological perspective, especially through the lens of social movement theory. It is the first book, grounded in empirical methodology, to describe the movement to a Western audience.

**A Dialogue of Civilizations: Gülen's Islamic Ideals and Humanistic Discourse** by Jill Carroll — Dr. Carroll places the ideas of Fethullah Gülen into the context of the larger humanities and compares his opinions with those of major philosophers. The book includes chapters on the ideas of the philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Confucius, Plato and Sartre.



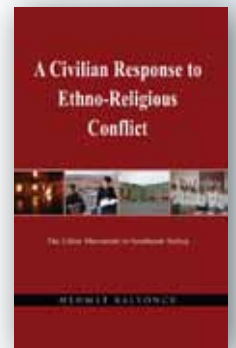
**Islam and Peacebuilding: Gülen Movement Initiatives** by John L. Esposito and Ihsan Yilmaz — The exploration of the contributions is made with regards to the title in hand by the thought and practice of the global movement associated with Fethullah Gülen. The importance and distinctiveness of teaching of Gülen and the practice of the movement is that it is rooted in a confident Turkish Islamic heritage while being fully engaged with modernity.

**The Gülen Movement: Civic Service Without Borders** by Muhammed Çetin — The book conceptualizes the Gülen Movement using social movement theories in which the author defines Gülen initiatives as a civic service dedicated to fostering dialogue within the global community. Dr. Çetin first examines the movement as a cultural actor, and then continues on another aspect of the movement as a civil society actor.



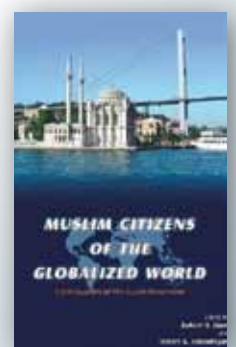
**Tradition Witnessing the Modern Age: An Analysis of the Gülen Movement** by Mehmet Enes Ergene — The author addresses different aspects of the Hizmet Movement with a focus on the movement's adaptation of the modern world and its influence on "the secularist Turkey."

**A Civilian Response to Ethno-Religious Conflict: The Gülen Movement in Southeast Turkey** by Mehmet Kalyoncu — The author studied the positive effect of the actions of the Gülen Movement in Southeast province called Mardin that faces ethnoreligious conflict.



**New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World** by Graham E. Fuller — The Former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council at CIA wrote about Turkey's new role in the Middle East especially from a political perspective along with its relations with other Muslim countries. As a means to portray a better view of a Muslim country with its relation to other Muslim countries, Fuller dedicates a section to "The Fethullah Gülen Movement."

**Muslim Citizens of the Global World: Contributions of the Gülen Movement** (edited) by Robert A. Hunt and Yüksel A. Aslandogan — The book explores the responses and contributions of Muslims in general and Turkish Muslims in particular to the waves of democratization, scientific revolution, changing gender roles, and religious diversity in an increasingly globalized world.





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# *Further reading and information*



Gülen's official websites  
[www.fgulen.com](http://www.fgulen.com)  
[www.fethullah-gulen.org](http://www.fethullah-gulen.org)

Fethullah Gülen Forum  
[www.fethullahgulenforum.org](http://www.fethullahgulenforum.org)

Intercultural Dialogue Platform  
[www.dialogueplatform.eu](http://www.dialogueplatform.eu)

Dialogue Society  
[www.dialoguesociety.org](http://www.dialoguesociety.org)

Dialoog Academie  
[www.dialoogacademie.nl](http://www.dialoogacademie.nl)

Plateforme de Paris  
[www.plateformedeparis.fr](http://www.plateformedeparis.fr)

Forum für Interkulturellen Dialog Berlin  
[www.dialog-berlin.de](http://www.dialog-berlin.de)

The Journalists and Writers Foundation  
[www.gyv.org.tr](http://www.gyv.org.tr)

Rumi Forum  
[www.rumiforum.org](http://www.rumiforum.org)

The Gülen Institute  
[www.guleninstitute.org](http://www.guleninstitute.org)



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