

A Communitarian Imperative: Fethullah Gülen's Modern Turkey as a Model

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Abstract

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in a 'communitarian' philosophic approach, such as that espoused by Amitai Etzioni to American societal reform and progress. Communitarianism is a social philosophy defined as 'the third way' beyond liberalism and conservatism. Upon close examination, the vision embodied in it has close parallels with much of the peaceful, educational, spiritual and moral philosophy found in the work of the M. Fethullah Gülen Movement and in much of modern Turkish culture and society as a whole. The paper examines the particulars of each and what exactly is being advocated, with emphasis on the common ground between the two, drawing especially on the efforts of the Institute of Interfaith Dialogue and their sponsored trips to Turkey. It then recommends ways in which Etzioni's group might reach out to the Gülen Movement for mutual understanding and borrowing of the most effective methods evident in their approach to peace, dialogue and understanding. It suggests that co-operative ventures in a similar vein might also be initiated between communitarian-minded groups in Europe and the Dialogue Society. It anticipates what might be some obstacles peculiar to American society in adopting such an effort and how these obstacles might be circumvented. There is also much that American society, and perhaps others as well, could learn from the spiritual and moral framework displayed in present Turkish society that embraces the Gülen spirit. As the paper concludes: The possibilities for a true communitarian imperative become manifest but will demand great joint effort. An effort, however, that can bear sweet fruit, like the trees along the thoroughfares in Turkey, for all. The Turkish word to describe the impetus of the Gülen movement is *hizmet*. That translates into English as 'service', which is a near perfect description of communitarianism.

1. Introductory Overview

One avenue in the furtherance of peaceful Muslim and non-Muslim relations is the identification of shared values and the adoption of joint efforts based on those values toward building civility and good citizenship among peoples. It would seem that many of the core values of the M. Fethullah Gülen movement and modern Turkish society together with those of the American-based Communitarian movement might offer one such fecund opportunity. Through dialogue and personal interaction, these two groups might discover ways of jointly advancing their mutual goals toward a more harmonious and pious society for all. The following treatise attempts to explore that possibility and offer some concrete steps to begin the process. While, in the interests of specificity, the discussion will focus on the Gülen movement's Institute of Interfaith Dialog (IID) headquartered in

Houston and the Communitarian Network located in Washington, D.C., it is hoped that the principles elucidated will by extension be equally applicable to other groups around the globe such as the Dialogue Society of London in Europe and the U.K. and European social movements sympathetic to and in communication with the Communitarian Network.

The discussion proper is divided into seven subsections. The first, *A Century of Turmoil*, establishes the historical and political context of communitarianism. The second, *The Third Way*, defines the communitarian movement in the U.S. Next, **The Turkish Connection** relates discovering the relevance of modern Turkish society and the Gülen movement to communitarian ideals. Then, *A Communitarian Cousin* compares the elements of the Gülen movement with those of "The Responsive Communitarian Platform," stressing the underlying similarities to be found there. Next, *A Communitarian Fertile Ground* explores modern Turkish society and community and the Gülen influence as a possible communitarian model structure. Then, *The Challenge of Community in America* examines whether the present American social and political fabric would realistically support a broad communitarian appeal, giving special attention to the two greatest obstacles—a failing education system and an oppressive tax code. Finally, A Blueprint for Action suggests several practical steps that might be taken by both the Gülen movement and the communitarian supporters to further their mutual interests and broaden their common ground into the population at large.

2. A Century of Turmoil

If there has been one great political lesson the 20th century has taught us, surely it is the undeniable truth of Lord Acton's astute dictum "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Notable examples abound such as Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, Fascist Italy, communist Russia, communist North Korea, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Idi Amin's Uganda, Saddam Hussein's Iraq—tragically the list goes on and on. It would seem only logical, then, that a benevolent thinker on the cusp of the 21st century would naturally distrust and eschew those political systems embracing some form of "central planning" warned about by F. A. Hayek and be drawn instead to one variety or another of a "classical liberal" or libertarian alternative. (Hayek, 1944, p. 34) Those words "individual freedom," when set against the term "totalitarianism," do possess an appealing ring. But as the post-9/11 world has revealed, liberty does come with its own set of challenges.

Although a segment of the political sympathies in the U.S. throughout much of the '90s did align well with a libertarian spirit, over time, particularly with the Libertarian Party's paltry response to 9/11, certain inadequacies in any strict adherence to that outlook began to reveal themselves. A libertarian system, almost by definition, presupposes a citizenry that is already educated, moral, ethical, informed, self-disciplined and respecting of the natural rights of every individual within that system. In that regard, it would seem to be a reward for a well-developed society rather than the beginning point for nurturing one.

Specifically, weaknesses in two main areas of that philosophy might be assailed. The first concerns the question of exactly how does a free society inculcate a moral point of view among its people, especially the youth, such that the interactions within that society can be conducted from a common frame of reference? And the second relates to the question of how does a free society deal with the

citizen who refuses to observe its most basic precepts in his conduct toward his fellow citizens? Under scrutiny it appeared that libertarianism could offer no satisfactory practical answer to either.

3. The Third Way

The communitarian movement commenced to gain some currency in the mid-90s through references to them in the political literature and discourse of the time. Dr. Amitai Etzioni founded the Communitarian Network in 1990 and serves at present as the director of the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies, both organizations being based at The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. (Etzioni, 2003, home page) The Communitarian Network is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian, transnational coalition of individuals and organizations who have come together to shore up the social, moral and political environment. (The Communitarian Network Web site, home page) The Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies is a research organization dedicated to finding constructive solutions to social problems through morally informed policy analysis and open moral dialogue, bringing the best scholarship and analysis to bear on policy issues affecting family, schools, the community and the moral climate of society.

[The Institute] is committed to fostering a greater sense of personal and social responsibility among individual citizens; to strengthening the cohesion of families and local communities; to encouraging reconciliation among different racial, ethnic, and religious groups; and to fostering a national policy debate more cognizant of humankind's moral horizon and the social responsibilities of the individual and the community. (Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies Web site, Who We Are page)

Upon examination of their tenets, some intellectuals discovered much to like there. Those with a social science background were especially appreciative of their recognition that, within the world in which we find ourselves, man is first and foremost a social being with social needs to be addressed. Man does, and should-regardless of individual preferences concerning degrees of autonomy-always exist within the body of a society. Furthermore, especially appealing to persons of faith was their recognition that man is additionally a moral and spiritual being. And any societal system that fails to take that into account is doomed to unravel.

Perhaps the greatest charge that could be leveled against them was their lack of specificity. One might characterize communitarianism as basically an attitude, not a policy-long on theory and ideals and short on practical detail, lacking a clear mechanism to effect their vision. And we all do well to bear in mind that adage "the devil is always in the details." Nevertheless, in 2003 a serendipitous chain of events commenced that would lead me personally to a whole new assessment of the possibilities for a "living" communitarian imperative.

4. The Turkish Connection

Following the explosion of the evolution/education debates of 2000 in Kansas, I joined an Internet listserv to keep abreast of the ongoing controversy. I was intrigued with the frequent postings of a Turkish Muslim in Istanbul, a rising young journalist named Mustafa Akyol. (Akyol, 2004) We struck

up an e-mail friendship and working journalistic relationship, which in turn led to my acquaintance with a group of Turkish students in my locale who were associated with IID-an organization promoting the vision of compassion, education and peace espoused by the Turkish spiritual leader M. Fethullah Gülen. (The Institute of Interfaith Dialog, 2002, p. 5) And this connection eventually resulted in my joining with a group of clergy in December, 2005, for an 11-day tour of Turkey to witness the Gülen philosophy in action. It was, for me, an experience of profound import.

What the tour provided to the participants was an opportunity to experience directly the history, culture, faith and people from which the Gülen movement took root and flourished. We were privileged to visit Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Konya, Ankara, Gaziantep, Urfa and Harran. At every stay the occasion for personal interaction with the people was made available and encouraged, especially during home visits. And guides were at our elbow at every turn to field our bevy of questions and serve as interpreters. (Scheel, 2006)

By way of background, M. Fethullah Gülen was born in Erzurum, Turkey, in 1941 and, following his retirement, came to the United States and presently resides in Pennsylvania. Often referred to as the "Mahatma Gandhi of Turkey" and "the modern Rumi," Mr. Gülen has been a teacher, Islamic scholar, thinker, prolific writer and poet of broad and significant influence. Topics of interest in his speeches and writings have ranged far beyond religious matters to include education, science, Darwinism, history, economics and social justice; however, his efforts in world interfaith dialogue and interfaith education have been groundbreaking and monumental. Gülen has observed, "There are so many things we have in common to emphasize." (Unal, 2000, p. 205) A unique aspect of the following he's engendered is that it is self-sustaining and self-proliferating, not dependent upon the charisma of its founder but rather upon the efficacy of his vision. (Gülen, 2004, pp. 3-9)

5. A Communitarian Cousin

It might be said that the core of the Gülen philosophy is a theistic view of the universe-in his case specifically a moderate Islamic one, but one compatible with the other Abrahamic faiths-and the moral order of man descending from that recognition. In contrast to the libertarian stance, Gülen articulates his perspective on individualism by stating, "[I]t is impossible to have unrestricted individualism. This is because humans are either both free with no acceptance of any moral values and rebellious with no moral criteria, or they are servants who are dependent on God and seriously obedient to His commands." (Saritoprak, 2005, p. 447) Much of his religious writing quotes both Christian and Judaic sources as well as Qu'ranic ones. And the central corollary to this view is the great emphasis on education "cradle to grave," education that encompasses the whole person-intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually-and is geared toward invigorating that person's heart and soul as well as mind to achieve competence in a societal niche useful to both himself and others. Education that occurs optimally within the context of a strong family structure, a historical heritage and a democratic polity. (Gülen, 2004, pp. 66-90) Education that awakens the individual's sense of responsibility because, according to Gülen, "Connecting or relating action to responsibility gives action its primary humane dimension." (Gülen, 2005, p. 99)

This vision has spawned a host of humanitarianlike efforts on an international scale. More than 700 Gülen schools of every academic level, where students of all faiths are taught together (sans "religious indoctrination" per se) by teachers of Turkish background, have sprung up across Turkey and in many countries far beyond on every continent. (Unal, 2000, p. vi) The emphasis is on academic excellence, and Gülen students always take the lion's share of trophies at world science, math, biology, chemistry and physics olympiads. Gülen was quick to recognize the power of mass media in disseminating his views and toward that end helped found the Journalists and Writers Foundation in 1994. In the area of health care, Gülen hospitals were established. (Scheel, 2006) In the interests of world peace and understanding, numerous intercultural and interfaith dialogue activities were created, our tour of Turkey sponsored by the IID being one. Businessmen and industrialists, power elite and community leaders have rallied to his call to help fund and support the creation and maintenance of these programs. A community spirit of good will and desire for harmony and progress permeates the Gülen vision throughout. (Unal, 2000, p. 325)

So, might there not be a correlation to communitarian philosophy evident in Gülen's perspective? A reading of "The Responsive Communitarian Platform" reveals clearly that movement's most salient concerns: the reciprocity of social life; renewed moral values; the importance of historical context; strong, participatory democracy; a vibrant family structure; schools and education; government involvement guided by degree of necessity; responsibilities of citizenship; protection of human rights; social justice; public safety and public health; and internationalizing the primacy of human community. (The Communitarian Network Web site, Project and Activities page) It would appear to be a most sensible outline of focus areas for community-minded attention that would, indeed, mesh well with the Gülen aim. In the words of Gülen himself, speaking of a spiritually-centered life: "Order is evident in every effort, and compassion resides in every achievement." (Gülen, 2004, p. 55) And elsewhere in an interview he states: "Personal and social responsibilities are inter-related the life of heart and spirit, and social and governmental issues are all facets of one unit." (Saritoprak, 2005, p. 449) Words which, it strikes me, apply equally to both the Gülen vision and the communitarian platform.

6. A Communitarian Fertile Ground

What cultural milieu might best be suited to fostering a communitarian approach? Might the land which nurtured the heart and soul of Fethullah Gülen be a candidate? Although all societies to one degree or another bear some burden of past injustices and current internal strife-Turkey being no exception as is vividly depicted in the novel *Snow* (Pamuk, 2004)-a focus on, and examination of, life and interaction at the local, community level can yield propitious insights regarding communitarian possibilities.

The modern Republic of Turkey dates back to 1923 and owes much of its progressive societal advancements to the efforts of its revered founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; however, its legacy as the heart of the once sprawling Ottoman Empire still exerts a measurable influence. (Ergener, 2002, p. 5) Traveling there, one quickly comes to appreciate certain bedrock strengths evident throughout the culture. To begin with, while Turkey prides itself on its secular governance, religiosity in day to day life is almost exclusively Muslim and pervasive. The call to prayer defines the structure of each

day and provides a commonality to the flow of life. The moral obligations of one man to another revealed in the Qu'ran are taken very seriously and inform the interactions at all social levels. Discretion is left up to the individual in matters such as imbibing alcohol or the wearing of the head scarf, but a spirit of comity is instilled at an early age and is evident everywhere, especially in domestic hospitality. When one is invited to a Turkish home for a meal, one comes away not only with a satisfied palate but also with a storehouse of good stories and lovely gifts. *Tesekkur ederim*, which means "thank you," are bound to be the first Turkish words learned and the most frequently employed.

Historically the land area now occupied by Turkey has been both a geographic and a cultural bridge between Europe and the Middle East. Countless armies and evangelists have crisscrossed these mountains and shores leaving behind their legacy in stone. And the Turkish people are mindful always to take pride in and preserve their archeological treasures as stones in the foundation of their modern civilization. (Ergener, 2002, p. 5)

Standing as a bulwark against civil unrest is a firm, ubiquitous military presence, and all young men must undergo a brief period of military training and service. Yet a great deal of emphasis is placed on individual responsibility and self-reliance throughout that society. Family structure is of the extended variety and sons are expected to care for their old. The family is also obliged to direct the religious training of the young and to oversee their schooling and education. Welfare assistance, when necessary, is often administered anonymously family to family or through the local mosque. (Ergener, 2002, pp. 31-37)

The culture is rich with charming observances and customs that in one way or another reveal a concern and charity toward one's fellow man. The prevalence of beautiful fruit trees and water fountains in public space, of which anyone may avail themselves without charge, is said to be provided so that no man need be left hungry or thirsty. The concept of neighborhood is inclusive of many dwellings round about any given one such that a family may quite literally be acquainted with more than 100 neighbors. And on an occasion such as the Festival of Sacrifice, these neighbors visit one another and exchange sacrificial meat. That would seem to be, indeed, the very definition of "community." (Ergener, 2002, p. 38)

All in all, Turkey is a modern nation putting itself on a par with many of its European brethren, yet at the same time retaining many of its classical traditions. Its strength as a nation of caring people derives from its moderate form of Islam, the secular reforms of Ataturk and, now, the compassionate vision of Gülen. During our visit there as we were departing a Turkish home one evening, an American priest remarked to me, "You know, there's a 'communitarian' flavor to all of this."

This observation is by no means confined alone to our travel companion of the cloth but rather is one shared by a number of other religious scholars writing on Gülen and Turkey. Dr. Tom W. Boyd at the University of Oklahoma states unequivocally, "Gülen's strategy is predominantly communitarian." (Boyd, 2006, p. 48) Marie-Elisabeth Maigre, in alluding to Gülen's analogy of society as an organism with interrelated parts "in need of one another," characterizes his view as defending "a communitarian vision of society ." (Maigre, 2006)

7. The Challenge of Community in America

The contrasts of American and Turkish societies are, admittedly, apparent and many. America is a young land of mobile, nuclear families and religious differences underscored by a materialistic bent. Yet Americans are caring in their own way and generous, too, particularly with domestic and international relief efforts. And as for group spirit, ask any fan what it is that reigns at any college or professional football or basketball game. But of the numerous conundrums facing the nation, there would seem to be two overweening obstacles to a "communitarian reformation" in America: a broken public education system and an out-of-control federal government. Discipline and achievement are waning in U.S. schools. Philosophical naturalism and "political correctness" dominate the zeitgeist of America's learning institutions as opposed to the universal theistic/Islamic frame of reference in Turkey. (Santos, 2006, p. 97) And government increasingly intrudes into the citizens' private lives, forcing them to pay for those intrusions with an oppressive tax system. Neither major political party seems willing or able to confront those stifling excesses and pursue serious corrective action. These conditions prevail as obstacles to revision in both external societal circumstances and within the internal mind-set of a significant segment of the population who have adopted an attitude of "what can Washington, D.C., do for me" rather than "what can I do for my community." So efforts toward substantive change are bound to be fragmented.

From a personal perspective and experience, it seems to me that the two largest subgroups in America today most closely resembling what we observe in Turkish society are the Catholic diocese and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Although one would be less than candid not to stress the differences in doctrine and ritual practices of these two Abrahamic-tradition religions, there is much common ground to be observed in the communal order, values and ethos of their adherents. Here we find superior education and discipline in the school system-especially the Catholic parochial schools-coupled with a nurturing of the spirit. (Boffetti, 2001) Each population is bonded by a common liturgy as well as various social activities and religious observances. There is a strong emphasis on tradition, family, charity, responsible stewardship and missionary efforts. An ambience of healing concern for one's neighbor is evident among the various congregations. For the individual, life is centered and grounded in the faith, and all one's decisions and actions emanate from that core, contributing to a stable, comely social environment. All of which proves that some of the most laudable attributes of the Turkish community are certainly evident in some form in America also. (Whitney, 2007) (Handbook for Today's Catholic, 1991)

Much of the systemic, bloated rot observable in American government today can be traced to the structure of the IRS and the lobbyist-driven manipulation of the tax code. To put it simply and bluntly, tax favors are sold for votes. Votes beget power. Power perpetuates itself. And now we're back to Lord Acton's admonishment. All of which results in an ever-ballooning federal bureaucracy with bumbling tentacles stifling the autonomy of those local and regional communities so necessary to an effective communitarian initiative. It would be disingenuous and remiss to pretend that realistic gains might be achieved in moving the social order toward a more communitarian structure without first confronting these gross impediments.

At present there are two major activist groups working at the grassroots level to address this problem and offer a reasoned, logical solution. Americans for Fair Taxation and Citizens for an Alternative Tax System (CATS) both advocate a retail sales tax at the national level concomitant with the abolishment of the income tax and IRS, and eventual repeal of the 16th Amendment. (Americans for Fair Taxation, Home page) (Citizens for an Alternative Tax System, Home page) Such a revised system would devolve power from both lobbyists and politicians while maintaining a revenue-neutral funding source for necessary government services. An additional monumental step, although not one advocated by either tax reform group, would be the enactment of Congressional term limits.

With these measures in place, it would then become feasible to earnestly address the public education dilemma. I believe a great starting point would be the elimination of the U.S. Department of Education, a concept that once held great currency, and a return to local control of the constitutional responsibility for educating the young. Let's be frank-the No Child Left Behind Act is an abysmal failure. And with local control would come the renewed opportunity for community input and direction in other areas as well. And, yes, for the preparation of a seedbed for the planting, tending and flowering of a true "communitarian imperative." This axial role of education is aptly described by Gülen himself: The main duty and purpose of human life is to seek understanding. The effort of doing so, known as education, is a perfecting process through which we earn, in the spiritual, intellectual and physical dimensions of our beings, the rank appointed for us as the perfect pattern of creation. (Unal, 2000, p. 305)

8. ABlueprint for Action

Having once been introduced to the communitarian concept, it was my acquaintance with students associated with the IID and my fortuitous travel to Turkey to experience the land and people that enabled me to envision its practical implementation. At its most fundamental, I see communitarianism as a mind-set and life style of individual social responsibility and reciprocal moral obligation. In many ways, I believe Turkish society infused by the Gülen movement offers a sterling example thereof. But what of its recognition and influence within the American homeland? How can it more effectively suffuse its message throughout the nation regarding a third approach for a concordant social order?

It is my perception that the character of government and education in America today precludes an optimal receptivity to communitarian ideals and must undergo some radical changes before such can hold sway. Because there is strength in numbers and leverage in coalition, I'd strongly urge communitarian leaders to join forces with Americans for Fair Taxation and Citizens for an Alternative Tax System to rid this nation of the scourge of the IRS and lobbyist domination. I would further encourage making Congressional term limits and the abolition of the U.S. Department of Education items on the communitarian agenda. The people desperately need to regain local control of their children's education and future. Once progress is accomplished in these areas, I believe the Gülen movement has much to teach and share with communitarians.

First, in that regard, I would encourage communitarian leaders to establish a relationship with the IID and attend the conferences/symposiums they sponsor annually such as the recent one in Norman, Oklahoma, titled *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*. An abundance of information can be obtained from the IID Web site. (The Institute of Interfaith Dialog Web site, home page) I would suggest in turn that IID leaders extend invitations to communitarian leaders to participate in an Interfaith Trip to Turkey. The cross-pollination of ideas could be immense.

Second, because communitarianism's influence at present tends to be centered in academic settings, IID might consider establishing a liaison with the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies with the aim of promoting the common elements of their respective messages beyond the classroom into American society at large. Both would profit from an increased exposure at the grassroots level.

Third, it might prove most beneficial for both IID and the Communitarian Network to foster a closer relationship with both the Catholic and Mormon churches. A reciprocity of good will there could reap quick results in spreading a recognition of communitarian goals among large numbers of people, especially those with a faith-based life style.

I believe with the reestablishment of the balance of power within American society combined with a greater public awareness of the communitarian mind-set, the possibilities for a true communitarian imperative become manifest. But achieving that balance of power will demand great joint effort. An effort, however, that can bear sweet fruit, like the trees along the thoroughfares in Turkey, for all. The Turkish word to describe the impetus of the Gülen movement is *hizmet*. (Kalyoncu, 2006) That translates into English as "service." What a perfect word to describe communitarianism.

9. Concluding Summary

How might peace-loving Muslims, such as those associated with the M. Fethullah Gülen movement, contribute directly to the promotion of a more harmonious, community-minded and spiritually-directed society in a Western nation such as the U.S.? Where the social and political theory of communitarianism relies mainly on abstract concepts, can the daily life in a Muslim nation such as Turkey suggest practical guidelines for that philosophy's implementation? An inquiry has been undertaken here as to whether a substantial possibility exists for the broader dissemination of communitarian ideas and ideals into present-day U.S. society and by extension internationally as well, and whether an approach employing peace-promoting, interfaith joint efforts with the Gülen movement might prove a feasible course.

The particulars of both "The Responsive Communitarian Platform" and the Gülen vision were outlined with especial attention drawn to the parallels therein. One can observe numerous attributes in common including a reverence for the spiritual and moral needs of humankind, a focus on bonding in a community venue, a strong emphasis on the centrality of education, an awareness of the responsibilities of citizenship and a desire for spreading good will internationally. Additionally, of vital importance is the fact that both groups exhibit a compassionate commitment to outreach. Then modern Turkish society at the community level was described and offered as an example of how a

living communitarian ethos might take form, illustrated by such customs as the Festival of Sacrifice and the general domestic hospitality of the people. Following that, a comparison was drawn between the Turkish example and the Catholic and Mormon church groups in American society, stressing social similarities with that of the Turkish Muslim community and establishing the realistic potential for a true communitarian structure in the U.S. Then two especially formidable obstacles to progress were identified-the failing public education system dominated by Washington, D.C., and the stranglehold of IRS and lobbyist influences-and remedies were suggested for both to better permit a groundwork receptive to communitarian thought. Finally, suggestions were put forth as to the ways and means the Gülen movement and the communitarian movement might exchange ideas and initiate joint ventures to the mutual benefit of both including attendance at the Gülen conferences, establishment of a liaison with the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies and participation in the Interfaith Trip to Turkey project.

All in all, an evaluation of the facts herein presented would seem to indicate a cooperative relationship between the two above-mentioned groups that would broaden the awareness of communitarian ideals and promote a positive public image of Islam would, indeed, be quite practicable. Furthermore, it is hoped that the recommendations pertaining to the work of IID and the Communitarian Network may by implication be germane to similar groups in other global regions such as the Dialogue Society (www.dialoguesociety.org) in Europe. The promise of deeper mutual understanding among those of Muslim and non-Muslim faiths through shared projects encouraging peace, responsibility and civility within communities is certainly one to be cherished, nurtured and embraced throughout the world.

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Author and editor based in Kansas City, working on Voices magazine. Past vocations include Red Cross worker, teacher and librarian. His Red Cross service included overseas assignments in Vietnam, Thailand, West Germany and England. He took graduate studies in English and taught at Emporia State University. He retired from the Johnson County Library in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, in 1997. His essays, articles, stories and poems have appeared in numerous periodicals and on several Web sites such as Kansas Quarterly, The Midwest Quarterly, The Kansas City Star and roguescholars.com. He has published three books; the most recent, *A Backward View: Stories and Poems*, received the J. Donald Coffin Memorial Book Award from the Kansas Authors Club. His latest book *Star Chaser* is not yet published, and he has work forthcoming in Fountain magazine.