

# Gülen's Paradigm on Peaceful Coexistence: Theoretical Insights and Some Practical Perspectives

by Gürkan Çelik, Kate Kirk, Yusuf Alan on 23 November 2007. Posted in Peaceful Coexistence

## Abstract

This paper contains an exposition of Fethullah Gülen's model of peaceful coexistence. Based on qualitative analysis of his writings, conversations, sermons and public speeches, the authors distinguish four dimensions of peace - *eternal peace, inner peace, interpersonal or intercommunal peace, and global peace* - not from a theoretical perspective, but as a practical guideline for those who seek to pursue peace. The paper argues that these four dimensions of peace are possible only when accompanied by moral values, mutual knowledge and acceptance of cultural and religious identity. In particular, the authors present and describe Gülen's idea of education as a practical means to achieve peace, and his dialogue approach as an alternative for dispute resolution and as a tool for building a culture of peace between and within societies. This analytical exploration of Gülen's teaching is helpful in challenging the thesis of an impending clash of civilizations in two ways: first, to live in peace as a result of dialogue and education is vital in today's world, where globalization, mass communication, and technology have pushed individuals and groups together in ways never before seen in human history. Second, Gülen pursues an inclusive middle way between fundamental futures of modernity and the Muslim tradition - science and Islamic knowledge, reason and revelation, progress and conservation, and free will and destiny - accepting them as two sides of the same reality.

## 1. Introduction

Cultural diversity and social plurality are inevitable both in Western and Eastern democracies. Over the past few decades, the passive, but accepting approach towards ethnic and religious multiculturalism in European societies has been replaced with concerned pleas for integration and even assimilation. This ideological and policy transition started with a number of intellectual contributions (Schnabel 1997; Bolkestein 1997; Scheffer 2000; Shadid & Van Koningsveld 2002), and was brought into full swing by a number of developments such as the 9-11 attacks and the subsequent atmosphere of unrest and mutual distrust between Muslims and non-Muslims around the world. European countries, in which a large number of Muslims are now living, have prided themselves for their open attitude and assumed a smooth accommodation of immigrants. Following the 9-11 terrorist attacks, European countries experienced some violence on their own soil convincing people that social, cultural and religious boundaries are deeper than previously thought. Particularly, in the Netherlands Pim Fortuyn, a charismatic politician with a number of anti-immigrant arguments on his agenda, gained tremendous popularity. His legacy-he was murdered in 2002 by a native Dutch

environmentalist-consists of a disregard for leftist multiculturalists politicians and of the belief that adjustment on the side of ethnic minorities was urgently needed (Ter Wal 2004). In November 2004 interethnic and inter-religious tension was stirred up again, when a young Dutch-Moroccan Muslim murdered another critic of Islamic culture, filmmaker Theo van Gogh. This incident provoked a wave of vandalism directed at mosques and Islamic schools, extremely prejudiced utterances, and an almost tangible discomfort among the Dutch of all descents. Considerably, the Dutch have long renowned for their tolerance, an image they seem to thank to their tradition of pillarization, in which Catholics, Protestants, socialists, and liberals lived separately in harmony (Vermeij 2006:19). The need to live in peace has been underscored by all these events of the past few years.

M. Fethullah Gülen [1941] is considered to be one of the most prominent Islamic scholars and a pioneer of dialogue that contributes to world peace. He has had great influence on young people with his modern approach in interpreting the Qur'ān and with his global activities in promoting education and seeking dialogue between members of different religions and cultures. Gülen is an important advocate of intercultural dialogue and in particular interfaith dialogue. He provides a source of inspiration for a new and cooperative approach to all monotheistic religions (Valkenberg 2006), which aims at supporting dialogue, harmony and conciliation between the 'People of the Book': Christians, Jews and Muslims. Gülen's vision for the future is an inspirational hope, where peace and justice are maintained in the world (Gülen 2005b). He has inspired an immense civil society movement that since the late 1960s has evolved and grown to encompass many facets of social life (Yavuz & Esposito 2003; Hunt & Aslandogan 2006). The movement is trying to act as a bridge in realising unity in multiplicity, synergy, social innovation, interaction and dialogue between the members of different cultures and civilizations. The movement advocates diversity and dialogue, and pays at great deal of attention to the reality of social and religious pluralism, contributing to communality and solidarity within society. More specifically, the Gülen movement is offering Muslims a way to live out Islamic values amidst the complex demands of modern societies. As well as belief and finding peace or the danger of being drowned in disbelief and distrust, Gülen expends efforts to solve a multitude of social, economic, political and cultural problems. Along with Mohandas Gandhi, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa, Fethullah Gülen can be seen as one of the twentieth century's great exponents of non-violent resistance.<sup>[1]</sup>

Through the writings of Fethullah Gülen we find a proper interpretation of Islamic teaching leads to truly spiritual values like forgiveness, social justice, inner peace, social harmony, honesty, and trust in God. This paper contains an exposition of Fethullah Gülen's understanding of peaceful coexistence. In particular, this paper highlights Gülen's idea of education as a practical concept of peace, and as a tool of building a culture of peace. Gülen has the conviction that the reliable and real road to peace and justice for humanity is dependent on the provision of an adequate and appropriate universal, multicultural and moral education integrating scientific knowledge and spiritual and ethical values.

After a quick survey on the index of words in Gülen's works, we found that 'peace' is one of the most used terms among other words like love, tolerance, affection, reason, faith, and humanity. Based on our analysis of his writings, conversations and public speeches, we distinguish and debate some

aspects of peace, not only from a theoretical perspective, but also as a practical guideline for those who seek to pursue peace. In addition to a systematic review of Gülen's works we used a number of semi-structured interviews with his sympathisers and the Gülen experts to give some ontological explanations concerning the following four dimensions of peace and to demonstrate its social implementations and implications in human life's and societies: eternal peace, inner peace, interpersonal and intercommunal peace, and universal peace. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via electronic mail-in either Turkish or English-lasting an average of one hour each. Interviewees were randomly chosen from a group of pre-selected experts and sympathisers who know Gülen's movement and are well acquainted with his ideas and initiatives as well. It is of particular interest to investigate what these respondents think about the Gülen's teaching, how they interpret his discourses and actions regarding peace. Interview questions were both open and close-ended and attempts to identify his vision of peace. We prepared an interview protocol, and pre-tested the interview by interviewing a religious studies scholar and a member of the Gülen movement. The interview guide was modified according to the suggestions made by these people.

After an examination of Gülen's understanding on moderate Islam and peaceful West, we will begin with the detailed and analytical exploration of Gülen's theological and sociological point of views on peace. Then, we will discuss peaceful coexistence through Gülen's educational initiatives, and his dialogue method as an alternative for dispute resolution between and within societies. The paper will end with some concluding remarks.

## **2. "Moderate" Islam and Peaceful West**

Gülen's views are dictated primarily by his religious belief and interpretation of Islam. Therefore, in order to understand what Gülen thinks about the West, it is important to first explore how Gülen understands Islam.

For Gülen, Islam is by its very nature moderate and therefore the recently popular phrase "moderate Islam" is incorrect as it implies that Islam can be anything but moderate or that there are some versions that are not moderate. Gülen espouses the conviction that moderation is such a central characteristic of Islam that any understanding of it that does not embody this cannot be Islamic. Moderation for Gülen means the middle-way and this is what he argues Islam is: "Islam, being the middle way of absolute balance between all temporal and spiritual extremes and containing the ways of all previous Prophets, makes a choice according to the situation" (Gülen 2005: 145).

Gülen holds the conviction that while there are certain fundamental tenets of Islam that are uniform and not open to interpretation, there are other realms of Islam which are. This provides Islam with a degree of flexibility and allows for various practices of Islam to develop that can manifest differences in terms of nuances and points of emphasis. Historical conditions, disparate settings, socio-cultural characteristics, language, and so forth are all factors that can help develop and produce a particular idiosyncratic practice of Islam unique to that region. So in Morocco, the Islamic conception of life came to mean activism, moralism, and intense individuality, while in Indonesia the same concept emphasized aestheticism, inwardness, and the radical dissolution of personality (Geertz 1971). Gülen firmly argues that "Anatolian Islam" resulted from the willing conversion of the Anatolian

Turks, a number of influential Sufi orders originated in Central Asia and Anatolia emphasising Islam's value of love, tolerance and inclusiveness and the adoption of the *Hanafi maddhab* (school of law) by the Turks in their practice of Islam. The Ottoman State experience with Islam meant that the Turkish people had greater opportunity to explore and experience Islam in various ways and thereby develop a better understanding of this religion. According to Gülen this all contributed to a broader, deeper, more tolerant, inclusive, pluralistic, spiritual and loving practice of Islam.

Gülen states that the word 'Islam' has three meanings, one within the other like three concentric circles. The narrow meaning at the very core of the three circles is that Islam is the name of the religion which stipulates how human should conduct his or her life. The second meaning is that Islam refers to the attributes and actions of people in the abstract, completely independent of the person himself. According to this meaning therefore, being honest is an Islamic attribute and may be found within a non-Muslim. Thus, a persons attribute(s) and action(s) may be Muslim while, she or he by social or religious classification is not. Likewise, the act that manifests itself from this attribute is categorised according to this meaning as either Islamic or non-Islamic. For example, stealing is a non-Islamic act and may be committed by a Muslim. Therefore, a Muslim who subscribes to the religion of Islam may, nonetheless, commit non-Muslim actions. The third concentric circle and most wide and encapsulating meaning of Islam, as emphasised by Gülen, is that it means the "laws of creation" (*seriat-i fitriye*) according to which the universe conducts itself. These laws, just as the rules of religion, were ordained by God. The only difference between the two is that while human beings have the free will to follow the laws of religion or not, he or she has no such choice when it comes to the laws of creation. Therefore, according to this view, everything, whether animate or otherwise, is a Muslim because it, unavoidably, continues its existence in accordance with the "laws of creation".

Important to note here is that the above analysis of the meaning of Islam does not include any reference to the notion of *Iman*, that is belief in God. Gülen emphasises the importance of the difference between the two. Islam is the laws and rules of God, *Iman* on the other hand is belief in God. Therefore, in drawing this distinction, Gülen states being a *Mumin* (one with faith) does not necessarily mean that one is a *Muslim* (one who follows Islam) and vice versa. In other words, a person may have faith and belief in God and as a result be a *Mumin*, but may not conduct his or her life according to the rules of Islam and thereby fail to be a Muslim. The opposite is also possible according to Gülen. A person may be a Muslim by attribute in the second concentric meaning of the word Islam but not have any belief in God. The following diagram visualises the three concentric meanings of Islam with its relation to *Iman*.

#### Diagram I. Three Concentric Meaning of Islam

Having looked at how Gülen understands the ethos, semantics and practice of Islam we will now attempt to evaluate how he views Western civilisation. It is clear from Gülen's views about Islam in general and Anatolian Islam in particular that Gülen adopts an inclusive, embracing and moderate approach. Therefore, Gülen's views of the West are primarily based on these dynamics.

Furthermore, Gülen considers his belief in God to be his greatest asset. Therefore, in light of recent misrepresentations of Islam in the West, Gülen argues that a Muslim's primary obligation is to make sure that this is rectified through showing Islam's true character to the world. This can only be done by engaging with that world.

On a practical level, Gülen states that the world has become a global village and that it is no longer either desirable, if it ever was, nor possible to close borders and not engage with the rest of the world. Thus, Gülen's view that Turkey and all other Muslim-populated countries should engage with the West rests on an inclusive, embracing and loving understanding of Islam as well as practical considerations of the time. In this regard, Gülen does not agree with those who are against the idea of interaction with the West on the basis that this will lead to the assimilation of the Muslim identity. Gülen argues that Muslims should have no such fear if they are sincere in their belief.

On the basis of the three concentric meanings of Islam, Gülen states that the West is more Muslim than the geographical Muslim countries because (a) it has more Muslim attributes than the Muslim countries in being just, progressive etc and (b) it has inevitably explored, discovered and engaged nature and cause in order to succeed in scientific and technological advancement. In discovering coal, melting steel, enhancing rocket science and reaching the moon, the West has learnt the laws of creation and used it to its advantage. Whether Western civilisation has done good or bad with this

scientific knowledge and experience is another matter. The point here is that in attaining such an understanding of science and in engaging the laws of creation, Western civilisation has become Muslim in the second and third sense of the word. As a result of this perspective Gülen states that he cannot understand how a devout Muslim would be against the West, as the West has attained its supremacy through inevitably following and obeying the universally applicable laws of creation ordained and created by God.

Having noted that, Gülen stresses that the scientific advancement in the West and its notion of modernity have also led to materialism at the exclusion of belief, spirituality and morals. This, Gülen argues, has resulted in crude fanaticism. The opposite however, the plight of Muslim countries is one of ignorance and bigotry. Thus, while Gülen finds that Western civilisation embodies some certain commendable attributes and a beneficial collective knowledge and experience of positive science, he also criticises its exclusively materialistic approach that, at present, provides no space for belief in God or spirituality within its realm of modernity. This sense of belief and spirituality remains and can be found in the Eastern world. Thus, Gülen strongly believes that the East and West have a lot to learn from each other and that a balanced and prosperous civilisation with a correct understanding of life can only be achieved through the fusion of the two. Therefore engaging with the West is a two-way process for Gülen, that which involves taking and giving.

### **3. The Middle Way and the Nature of Human Being**

In his comprehensive study, Pannenberg (1985) considers human beings to be part of nature and discusses the human person in his or her social world: its culture, history and institutions. Hence, it could be said that the human being is the essence and the vital element of being, the index and core element of the universe and societies. Democritus described the human being as "a world in miniature", a microcosm (Diels, Frag. 34). A human being is an image of the macrocosm by virtue of containing all the strata of reality (body, mind and spirit). The Stoic approach understood humanity in the framework of the cosmic order as a microcosm that reflects on the macrocosm of the physical universe (Pannenberg 1985:27). In a similar respect, Gülen considers the human person as a sample or a model of the universe. Gülen (2000:7-8) symbolizes human beings as mirrors for God's names and attributes, and confidently argues that therefore human beings are distinguished from the rest of creation with the honour of being responsible for making the Earth prosperous in God's name. He argues that the individual and collective happiness lie in disciplining three innate faculties (reason, anger, and lust) to produce a young, "golden generation" that will learn theoretical aspects of the middle way between materialism and metaphysics, between modernity and tradition, and will bring it into practice. This generation is supposed to absorb and represent both modern realities and Muslim morality and identities through its mind, its behaviours and its spirituality.

The middle way is an important concept in Gülen's understanding, which is, to a great extent, similar to Aristotle's (Kuru 2003). Aristotle criticized the Platonic 'virtue versus vice' categorization and classified phenomena in three groups, two of which are vices (excess and deficiency) and one of which is virtue (the mean or the middle way). In his typed series of sermons entitled *Ahlaki Mülahazalar* (vols. 1-14) Gülen (1998) interprets and repeats the important Islamic concept of *sirat-i müstakim* (the straight path), which is recited in a Muslim's prayers forty times a day, as the middle

way between ifrat (excesses) and tefrit (deficiency). From this perspective and since the time of Ibn Miskawayh<sup>[2]</sup>, human faculties or "drives" have been dealt with in three categories: intellect, zeal, and lust (Ünal 2006:30). Intellect or reason enables the human person to make the right decision, and encompasses all human powers such as conception, imagination, calculation, memory, learning, and so on. Zeal or anger covers the power of self-defence, which according to Islamic jurisprudence is defined as that needed to defend the faith and religion, sanity, possessions, life and family, and other sacred values. The man and woman desires or lusts after the opposite sex and loves their children and worldly possessions. In other words, lust or desire is the name for the driving force of one's animal appetites. These three main drives or faculties are presented in the following matrix (Celik & Alan 2003:25-26):

DRIVES	LEVELS / LIMITS		
	Excess	Middle way	Deficiency
Intellect	demogogy	wisdom	stupidity
Zeal	rage	courage	cowardice
Lust	licentiousness	chastity	frigidity

*Table I. Drives of a human person*

In sum, a most important characteristic of ideal human is that he or she finds a balance in the middle way and practices these sources of all abilities and qualities in human life.

#### 4. Four Dimensions of Peace from Gülen Perspective

In this section, we examine how the concept of peace fits into Gülen's ethical thoughts. In his writings and speeches, we find that he treats various aspects and elements of peace. Using some practical consequences of his thoughts and teachings, we have identified four main dimensions of peace (Celik & Valkenberg 2007) which will allow us to conceptualise Gülen's ethic of peace within a theoretical framework.

##### 4.1. Eternal Peace

First, Gülen envisages *eternal peace* as the ultimate goal of human life, almost synonymous with salvation. Specifically, it is the final destination of the collective personality of those who serve humanity (*hizmet*). In the eschatological sense, when one manages to direct oneself toward the path of eternal life and happiness, however miserable and troublesome one's life may be, as one considers this world to be the waiting lounge for Heaven, one accepts everything contentedly and gives thanks. He sees the members of his *hizmet* (service) movement, through their efforts carried out in solidarity and sincerity, as contributing in their diverse activities to the building of an eternal realm of peace and happiness. This concept not only gives meaning and direction to individual acts,

but in this way the believer also achieves a kind of conquest over death. Gülen (2004a:78) indicates that people have a great need for religion, and for the peace and security provided by religion. In his writings, Gülen relates to a hadith including: "deeds are judged by intentions"<sup>[3]</sup> and he emphasized that the intention of the believers is more important than the act itself. Human beings will try to live with a greatness of intention that will be great enough to enable them to appreciate eternity and thus imbue them with an inner peace that comes from being connected to eternity. For Gülen, eternal peace means achieving God's approval, walking in the greatest spiritual ecstasy, overstepping the boundaries of existence and reaching Eden, with contemplation of the eternal togetherness in the hereafter. On the contrary, a believing soul, giving expression to the chilling nature of the denial of truth and any attempt to conceal it, yet at the same time, expressing the eternal peace that faith promises, calls out in the following ode of Akif:<sup>[4]</sup> "A rusted (rotten or morally corrupt spiritual) heart which has no faith is a burden for the breast" (Gülen 2004a:137).

Islam literally means 'surrender'. Epistemologically, the word 'Islam' derived from the root words *silm* (security) and *salamah* (safety), means surrendering, guiding to peace and contentment, and establishing security, safety and accord. Etymologically speaking, the word Muslim and the verb *sa-li-ma*, both come from the root *silm*. Muslims greet everyone with *salaam*, thereby placing love for themselves in everyone's heart.<sup>[5]</sup> They end their prayers with *salaam*. According to Gülen (2004a:54), these principles are essentials to and permeate the lives of Muslims: When Muslims stand to pray, they cut their connection with this world, turning to their Lord in faith and obedience, and standing at attention in His presence. Completing the prayer, as if they were returning back to life, they greet those on their right and left by wishing peace: 'Remain safe and in peace'. With a wish for safety and security, peace and contentment, they return to the ordinary world once again. Gülen (2004a:58) considers this peaceful attitude of greeting and wishing safety and security for others as one of the most beneficial acts in Islam. Gülen (2004a:218) describes those who dedicate themselves to doing good for humanity as altruistic that they can even sacrifice their lives for others, and in doing so they have found peace in their conscience.

## 4. 2. Inner Peace

A second dimension of peace might be called *inner peace*: tranquillity and peace of mind, an inner confidence born of faith that enables the religious believer to face adversity without anxiety or despair. In the psychological sense, peace of mind has been seen as being in the possession of new technological equipments and the achievements of physical comfort. At times it has been connected with tranquillity, hard work, financial wealth, the satisfaction of carnal desires, and boundless freedom. However, for Gülen (2004a:159) it is only possible as the peace of mind pursued of is the fruit of virtue within faith and can only be attained through perfect faith. Particularly when one is facing the approach of death, the believer can attain a peace of mind which will enable them to overcome spiritual turmoil and fear. He describes the people of faith as peaceful with themselves: "worldly people who are enslaved by their egos live only to fulfil their carnal desires. Never content, they feel no tranquillity. But ideal people are always at peace with themselves (*interior peace*) and always feel secure. They are content and, furthermore, they place their knowledge and understanding at the service of humanity" (Gülen 2004a:129,159). As a result, people of faith feel



themselves to be in an expansive atmosphere of peace and the society becomes a society of conscience and peace.

'Jihad' is an element of Islam which is primarily defined as the inner struggle of a believer against all that stands between the believer and God. Gülen (2004:171-172; 1998a,b) describes that jihad occurs on two fronts; the internal and the external. The internal struggle (the greater jihad) is the effort to attain one's essence; the external struggle (the lesser jihad) is the process of enabling someone else to attain his or her essence. The first is conducted on the spiritual front, for it is one's struggle with their own inner world and carnal soul (*nefs*). In other words, the greater jihad is based on overcoming obstacles between oneself and one's essence, and the soul's reaching knowledge, eventually divine knowledge, divine love, and spiritual bliss. The second is, however, material and based on removing obstacles between people and faith so that people can choose freely between belief and disbelief. Both of these jihads have been carried out successfully, the desired is established. If one is missing, the balance is destroyed. Gülen argues that believers find peace and vitality in such a balanced jihad.

Further, Gülen (2004a:1-2) states that love is the most essential element of every being, and becomes a magic elixir to overcome every obstacle, a powerful key to open every door, and a source of altruism, stating: "Those who possess such an elixir will sooner or later open the gates to all parts of the world and spread the fragrance of peace everywhere, using the 'censers' of love in their hands". Moreover, Gülen (2004a:6) stresses that "a human is a mirror of another human". He emphasises that the level of one's understanding and appreciation of one another depends on how well one recognize the qualities and riches that each person possesses. Also, he has the conviction that peace, happiness and security at home is the mutual accord between the spouses in thought, morals, and belief, which can result in a healthy family life and a good education for their children (Ünal & Williams, 2000:311).

#### **4. 3. Interpersonal and Intercommunal Peace**

A third aspect of peace refers to *interpersonal*, and broadly formulated, *intercommunal peace*. Gülen sees interior peace, not only of individuals but of environs, communities and whole societies, as a precondition for healthy and hearty dialogue among peoples, and as one of the marks of Islamic civilization. He has the conviction that along with justice, harmony, brotherhood, solidarity, human progress and spiritual advancement, peace should characterize the Muslim's daily life. It is peace as the basis of societal relations which should be the force that attracts others to Islam. So important is the element of forgiveness and pardon in human relations that Gülen constantly recommends his students and followers to pardon each other's faults immediately. Gülen (2005a:75) expresses the core of his message regarding tolerance, dialogue and peace in his book "Pearls of Wisdom": "be so tolerant that your heart becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love for others. Offer a hand to those in trouble, and be concerned about everyone." He defines tolerance as the most essential element of moral systems, a very important source of spiritual discipline and a celestial virtue of perfected people (Gülen, 2004a:33-34). To him, tolerance does not mean being influenced by others or joining them; it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them and to become protectors of the general peace and contentment (ibid:42). At the

same time, Gülen claims that Muslim citizens in European countries can only live in harmony in those countries by means of a vast atmosphere of tolerance (ibid:43).

In addition, Gülen frequently refers to the Qur'ān accepting forgiveness and tolerance as basic principles. He suggests that to expend efforts for dialogue with the belief that "peace is better" (Qur'ān 4:128), and continuously advocates peace, nationally and internationally. The Qur'ānic verses that introduce 'the servants of God' are as follow:

[ ] And the servants of (God) the All-Merciful are those who move on the Earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say: 'Peace' (Qur'ān 25:63)." [ ] When they meet hollow words or unseemly behaviour, they pass them by with dignity (Qur'ān 25:72). [ ] And when they hear vain talk, they turn away there from and say: "To us our deeds, and to you yours. (Qur'ān 28:55).

The general gist of these verses is that when those who have been favoured with true servitude to God encounter meaningless and ugly words or behaviour they say nothing unbecoming, but rather pass by in a dignified manner. In short: "everyone acts according to his own disposition" (Qur'ān 17:84) and thus displays his or her own character. The character of heroes of dialogue is gentleness, consideration, and tolerance. This mildness is presented in the Qur'ān as 'gentle words'. "When God sent Moses and Aaron to a man who claimed to possess divinity, as the Pharaoh had done, he commanded them to behave tolerantly and to speak softly" (Qur'ān 20:44).

Without exception and regardless of differences in faith, ethnicity and culture, one meets everyone and this generally breaks the tension of people toward probable opponents. For Gülen, it is an Islamic principle to love those things or people who must be loved in the way of God and to dislike those things or people who must be disliked on the way of God. "Disliking in the way of God" applies only to feelings, thoughts and attributes. Thus, people should dislike such things as immorality, disbelief and polytheism, not the people who engage in such activities. Gülen (2004a:60) cites that Prophet Muhammad once stood up out of respect for humanity as the funeral procession of a Jew passed by. When reminded that the deceased was a Jew, the Prophet replied: "but he is a human," thereby showing the value Islam gives to human beings in general. This action demonstrates how people of different faiths and cultures should respect every person to coexist peacefully.

Besides this, Gülen (2004a: 61) gives another example to state that the Prophet was inordinately sensitive with regard to respecting others: the Prophet one day admonished a Companion who had been heard insulting Abu Jahl, when in an assembly of Companions where Abu Jahl's son Ikrimah was present: "Do not hurt others by criticizing their fathers."<sup>[6]</sup> Gülen (2004a:74-75) also significantly views the form and style of debate inherited from Nursi: "Anyone who is happy about defeating an opponent in debate is without mercy." He explains the reason for this further: "You gain nothing by such a defeat. If you were defeated and the other was victorious, you would have corrected one of your mistakes." Debate should not be for the sake of one's ego, but rather to enable the truth to come out. He suggests that debate can only take place in an environment that is conducive to dialogue. The Qur'ān (29:46) prescribes: "[ ] And discuss you not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation)". This verse describes the method, approach, and manner that should be used to communicate and interact with the other(s). Those who consider themselves

addressed by these aforementioned verses, all devotees of love who dream of becoming true servants of God merely because they are human beings, those who have declared their faith and thereby become Muslims and performed the mandated social and religious duties, must behave with tolerance and forbearance and expect nothing from other people. Gülen (2004a:61) suggests the approach of Yunus Emre:<sup>[7]</sup> not to strike those who hit them, not to respond harshly to those who curse them, and not to hold any secret grudge against those who abuse them. In addition, one conspicuous characteristic of Gülen's understanding of peaceful coexistence is that he begins by addressing closed circles and subsequently seeks ways to approach broader and more open societies (Celik & Valkenberg 2007).

#### **4.4. Universal Peace**

A fourth dimension of peace distinguished by Gülen is *universal* or *global peace*. He emphasized the importance of the indispensability of religion and intercultural dialogue for world peace through his efforts to meet with other religious and community leaders within his native country and abroad. In addition to rules that guarantee peace and security, there are also verses in the Qur'ān related to attitudes that should be taken against criminals and people who cause anarchy and terror; for such people there are legal sanctions, punishments, and retaliations. Indeed, the Qur'ān (4:128) states "peace is better" as a general rule. Gülen (2004a:72) stresses that peace, justice and stability are of the utmost importance to Islam; fighting and war are only secondary occurrences which are bound to specific reasons and conditions. He opposes the use of violence to attain political ends, and teaches his followers that the days of getting things done by brute force are over. In today's enlightened world the only way to get others to accept your ideas and ways is by persuasion and the use of convincing argument." (Ünal & Williams, 2000:319). Only through cooperative understanding, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and a process of mutual respect can communities coexist in harmony.

He expresses the longing for a time of peace and prosperity for all. Even though the consideration of the world as a village becomes firmer and more prevalent over the course of time, different beliefs, races, customs, and traditions will continue to cohabit in this village. Gülen (2004a:250) powerfully argues that the peace of this global village lies in respecting all these differences, considering these differences to be part of nature and in ensuring that people appreciate and share these differences. A major concept related to Gülen's teaching on peace is his understanding of 'nation'. Although this concept refers particularly to the Muslim world and the Turkish nation in the context of their roles in shaping human history, as major players and representatives of global peace, there is certainly more to it than just the concept of one particular nation, especially when we look with Gülen's vision and his idealism of dialogue and tolerance. In his teaching, Gülen discourse-solutions for freedom and an honourable stand can be used by any suppressed community. The motivating ethos behind Gülen's career as clearly manifested in numerous dialogue activities and education initiatives is one of a worldwide peace which will be accomplished by the participation of all nations. His definition of nation does not comprise one race or ethnic group; Anatolian has always been a land of diverse ethnic groups throughout human history, which form one united nation today. Exempt from any

chauvinist characteristic, he addresses the colourful mosaic of Anatolia including like a crucible for peoples that have come from Central Asia, Balkans, and Mesopotamia.

Concretely, Gülen (2004a:261-262; Capan, 2005) was one of the first Muslims who released a press declaration within 24 hours of September 11th terrorist attacks renouncing them. He regarded these atrocities as a great blow to world peace that unfairly tarnished the credit of believers:

"[ ] terror can never be used in the name of Islam or for the sake of any Islamic ends. A terrorist cannot be a Muslim and a Muslim cannot be a terrorist. A Muslim can only be the representative and symbol of peace, welfare, and prosperity. [ .] If a ship is carrying nine criminals and one innocent person, Islam does not allow for the ship to be sunk in order to punish the nine criminals; doing so would violate the rights of the one innocent person (Gülen, 2004a: 62, 261).

He further defines a Muslim as a person of love and affection who avoids every kind of terrorist activity and who has no malice or hatred for anyone or anything. To him, true Muslims can only be the most trustworthy representatives of universal peace.

Gülen proposes education as a method to realise global peace and progress. In the following section we will discuss educational initiatives inspired by him from the perspective of peaceful coexistence.

## **5. Peaceful Coexistence through Universal Education**

Gülen is convinced that a better and peaceful future for humanity can be established only through universal and intercultural education. An education of the heart and soul as well as of the mind and character, aimed at reviving and invigorating the whole being to achieve competence and providing goods and services useful to others. Education is the most important element in the Gülen movement and it is also an effective tool for the longevity of the movement (Agai 2002; Celik & Celik 2005). The Gülen movement opened about 500 schools all around the world (Agai 2004). In these schools children from different ethnic, and cultural backgrounds are educated by mainly Turkish graduates from renowned Turkish universities (Ates, Karakas & Ortayli 2005). Thomas Michel, who was active for years in Asia as part of the Vatican's Council's initiative for inter-religious dialogue, was impressed by such schools. Michel describes how he came into contact with schools inspired by Gülen during his residence in Zamboanga, on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Initially, Michel found the name of the school, *The Philippine-Turkish School of Tolerance*, in Zamboanga rather surprising and a startling affirmation in an area characterized by outbursts of violence between Muslims and Christians. Michel (2003) indicates that the school seems to do justice to its name by employing an equal number of Christian and Muslim teachers, by educating Muslim and Christian children and by promoting cooperation with Christian institutions in the area. An overwhelming majority of the respondents emphasized that the process of education for harvesting peace is a lifelong process and continuum that extends from early childhood to adulthood as modes and levels of education. Related to the role of education in peace and dialogue process respondents also stressed:

"Gülen's educational understanding for building peace encourages learners to draw lessons and inspirations from the role models provided by innumerable human beings respected for practising values, virtues and conduct that transcend greed, animosities, and desires to control and possess others or things."

In addition, respondents pointed out that Gülen's conviction is that the reliable and true road to peace and justice for humanity is dependent on the provision of an adequate and appropriate education integrating scientific knowledge and spiritual and ethical values. Many of Gülen's followers say that educational practices, media activities and dialogue projects inspired by him to build a culture of peace promote key values in various faith and spirituality traditions that have been recognized through interfaith and intercultural dialogue as a body of common and shared values for guiding peaceful conduct and relations among peoples, communities and nations.

The movement's schools form 'white islands' on the Earth, what Gülen calls "islands of peace". To many respondents, the schools of his volunteer movement make a significant contribution to the construction of a happy world, and attempt to build on universal values and peace:

"The Gülen's movement attempts to build on universal values and peace. The schools form, "peace islands" where cultures and civilizations meet and reach a consensus. His volunteer movement is a framework of emphasizing and gathering around universal humane virtues, and a framework of respect for the position of those with "different" perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts."

The respondents maintained that building peace through education is a sustainable reconciliation in divided societies. Gülen's educational vision involves not only schools, but also families, communities, and the media. Interviewees indicated that Gülen claims a holistic education requiring a learning circle that consists of family, school, friends, neighbours, faith and cultural organizations, and workplaces. This allows children from an early age, to learn that they are members of communities (local or global) who need to live together in harmony and peace.

## **6. Dispute Resolution through Dialogical Approach**

In this section, we set out to highlight insights on dispute resolution through dialogue and tolerance, using some paradigms contained in Gülen's and others' teaching. From tolerance and dialogue, Gülen (2004a:45) understands embracing people regardless of differences of opinion, world-view, ideology, ethnicity, or belief. 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. From another approach, for Gülen it means-in the words of the Turkish poet Yunus Emre-loving the created simply because of the Creator. On the basis of our study, we propose here that Gülen's tolerance and intercultural dialogue method can be seen as an alternative method for dispute resolution in and between societies. So important is the element of forgiveness in human relations that Gülen (2004a:27-29,34) recommends that his followers and sympathizers pardon each other's faults and mistakes immediately. Comparably, the Pope John Paul II (2002) believed that forgiveness and justice will heal most of our wounds in social life, and are the divine instruments to coexist peacefully. Similarly,

Gopin (2001) presents forgiveness as an element of conflict resolution in religious cultures to walk the tightrope of reconciliation and justice.

Religion is usually cited as the cause of or at least a factor to conflict around the world (Coward & Smith 2003; Smock 2002; Gopin 1997, 2002; Abu-Nimer 2001). Arthur Schneier (in: Smock 2002) points out that religion is never the real cause of conflict within or between societies, but it is often identified as an excuse for other causes such as ethnicity, economic disparities, and regional differences. Based on his experience and studies on conflict resolution, Abu-Nimer (2003) identifies four phases of development in an effective experiment of interfaith dialogue. He suggests that the earlier encounters should focus on individual and group similarities in theologies and scriptures. One example could be to jointly study the sacred texts of each religion. It must be remembered that the goal for these studies is not debate or conversions. These shared studies should yield deeper bonds through invitations to homes and meetings with families. The second phase is to deepen the relationship through joint prayers that are not contradictory to the other faith and by participating in the other faith's rituals. Having established trust and an understanding of the other faith, the third phase is to discover and confirm differences in religious values and faith practices. The final step should be exploring the ways in which messages of different faiths can benefit people from other religious traditions in the same community.

The core of Huntington's (1993) clash of civilizations thesis is based on the observation of a shift of paradigm. A paradigm is the product of the interaction of the cultural medium and of the thinking minds and provides a basis for understanding. A shift in paradigm means that we start to understand, or interpret same realities in a different way. Huntington claimed that the clash of civilizations is inevitable because the modern paradigm was a paradigm of clash and conflict. Huntington has been harshly criticized by advocates of dialogue for his remarks on the inevitability of clash. But one has to give the credibility to Huntington on the observation he made about the shift of paradigm. Indeed, the world is more and more exposed to a possible 'clash of civilizations'. The twentieth century produced more prejudices than the totality of the twenty preceding centuries: now we need a strategy to heal these wounds. In medical terminology curing an illness is something, preventing its symptoms is another. Conflict resolution strategies, usually do not 'cure', they only suppress the symptoms. Prejudices, and paradigmatic thinking patterns are learnt behaviours; a person does not forget them easily, and needs to replace them with other habits, patterns, bits of knowledge.

Paradigms do not shift daily. They are produced through continuous hermeneutical circles that change us by changing how we interpret reality. Gadamer formulated the philosophy of hermeneutical circles to show how understanding the 'other' changes the 'self'. If these hermeneutical circles of understanding are healthy than a dialogue between different cultures gives way to a higher level of understanding, a new paradigm where members of each cultures learn how to appreciate the others. But if these hermeneutical circles are false, if the 'other' is a 'false, imagined, non-existent other' than the circles give way to an unhealthy shift in the paradigm. In epistemological terms the 'real other' is killed through 'not knowing it'. Once the 'other' is killed, in Levinas's understanding, the 'self' is also killed, and the subject of knowing, the 'I' commits suicide.

An interviewee exemplified what a false hermeneutical circle means in practical life:

"Let's think that Muhammad and Jonathan are speaking. Muhammad is not free of his cultural medium. He has been educated about the crusading, colonizing and evangelizing Western Christian. And Jonathan knows of 9/11, Jihad, suicide bombers, invading Ottomans, and of course the mushrooming mosques all over his country. These are not necessarily wrong. But any hermeneutical circle that will be based on these perceptions is going to be a false circle of understanding. In the end their speech will turn out to be more of a dialectical or apologetic nature, than a dialogical one."

A collection of such contacts in time forces the paradigm to shift further. What produced a shift in the civilizational paradigm is actually a continuity of 'false hermeneutical circles'. False, because the dialogue is done not with the other, but with the 'false other', or the 'perceived other', or in Levinasian terms, the 'killed other'; and false, because once the other is false, the self is false either; a 'perceived self', or 'a self that committed suicide through killing the other', or a Bakhtinian 'non-existent self'. Healing of the paradigm, as such, necessitates a creation of the other and the self through 'reverse hermeneutical circles'.

In practical terms, we can say that a dialoguer needs to create a new, local or universal, paradigm so as to facilitate peaceful interpretation of the actual reality. We, as different ontologisms, or as adherents of different faiths, ideologies, religions, need to speak to each other, in a way to heal the paradigm, to reverse the vicious circles of misunderstandings, prejudices, libels. And the end product of this healing of the paradigm is not only peace, but existence. "You are not really you, because you define yourself according to your definition of me and of others. And since you define me wrong, you define yourself wrong. Epistemologically you have committed suicide. Give me my life back, and be resurrected." This is the promise of dialogical philosophy for the sake of peaceful coexistence.

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

In today's global village, borders have blurred and several cultures come into contact more often and more intensively with each other. The interethnic and interreligious climate throughout the world, in particular in the Netherlands, has undergone a dramatic change in recent years. Social mediation and peaceful coexistence within the context of cultural, ethnic and religious divisions, hierarchies, rivalries and conflicts that are grounded in socio-economic and political realities have become vital necessities of our time in order to maintain social cohesion where an appreciation of diversity must stand as a main point of reference, paving the way for intercultural dialogue vis-à-vis processes of globalisation, migration and the transnationalization of social relations. In order to achieve this and to build bridges between different cultures socially innovative projects should be implemented to tackle the problems stemming from the migration, the emergence of transnational and diaspora communities and their role in (inter)national conflicts, as well as the re-emergence of religious groups and identities, the politicisation of religion and the rise of religious fundamentalisms in the context of global geopolitical and economic coalitions, and hence new conflicts and wars. Both compassionate love as a way for inner peace and intercultural dialogue as a preventive strategy for dispute resolution and social mediation are important socially innovative methods in our age of

globalization that refers to the intensification of worldwide social relations and the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between the states, societies and peoples, which make up the modern world system.

Our analysis of Gülen's ideas is helpful in disproving the thesis of clash of civilisation, and provides a healing of this paradigm in two ways. First, to live in peace as a result of dialogue and education is vital in today's world, where globalization, mass communication, and technology have pushed individuals and groups together in ways never before seen in human history. In today's world of global connectedness, peoples must develop the capacity to dialogue and create relatedness with people coming from vastly different worldviews. Developing strategies and capacities for peaceful coexistence amidst radical difference and shrinking natural resources is the central challenge of our era. Second, Gülen pursues an inclusive middle way between fundamental futures of modernity and the Muslim tradition-science and Islamic knowledge, reason and revelation, progress and conservation, and free will and destiny-accepting them as two faces of the same reality.

Dialogue and the four aforementioned dimensions of peace are possible only when accompanied by moral values, mutual knowledge and acceptance of cultural and religious identity. We can arguably say that the movement that has evolved around the ideas of Fethullah Gülen provides initially and primarily an example of a renewal with a potential to influence both the Muslim and non-Muslim individuals (Yilmaz 2003). A number of positive NGOs and peaceful institutions (e.g. schools) led by volunteers, social innovators and peaceful, servant leaders can form "islands of peace" throughout the globe. This depends on deep and large-scale systems change, involving work with idealist people from all faiths, multi-national corporations, government agencies, and civil society organizations all over the world. The Gülen movement provides a unique case in this regard.

The movement is a growing approach to the reunification of faith and reason with hopes for a peaceful coexistence between liberal democracies and the religiously diverse. Gülen has developed a peaceful approach to religion and science as two aspects of the same reality complementing one another. By-him inspired civic movement challenges to build a peaceful world based on dialogue, tolerance, respect and compassion, and to raise individuals who use their intellect, zeal and lust lawfully and in moderation.

[1] A series symposia, entitled 'Frontrunners for Peace', held on February 11, 2004 (Radboud University Nijmegen), and March 16-17-18, 2005 (Tilburg University, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and University of Amsterdam) at four Dutch universities, discussed Gülen among contemporary heroes of peace; see the booklet edited by Gurkan Celik, et al. 2005, *Voorlopers in de Vrede* [Forerunners for peace]. Damon: Budel, The Netherlands; Gülen's efforts for worldwide peace have also been echoed at "The Peaceful Heroes Symposium", organized on April 11-13, 2003 at the University of Texas, Austin. Furthermore, in March 2004, the Spirituality Foundation of Kyrgyzstan awarded Gülen with its "Intersociety Adaptation and Contribution to Peace Prize" for his contributions to International peace through his thoughts and initiatives in education.

[2] Ibn Miskawayh [c.930-1030] is a Muslim moralist, philosopher and historian. His moral treatise *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, influenced by the Aristotelian concept of the mean, is considered one of the best



statements of Islamic philosophy. His universal history Kitab Tajarib al-Umam wa Ta'auqub al-Himam (Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate), was noted for its use of all available sources and greatly stimulated the development of Islamic historiography.

[3] Bukhari, Bad'ul-Vahy 1, Itk 6; Muslim, Imarat, 155; Abu Dawud, Talak, 11.

[4] Mehmed Akif Ersoy [1873-1936] is the renowned Turkish poet who also wrote the Turkish National Anthem.

[5] Buhhari, Iman, 20; Muslim, Iman, 63.

[6] Hakim, al-Mustadrak, 3:241; Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'Ummal, 13: 540.

[7] Yunus Emre [1238-1320] is a poet and Sufi who had a powerful influence on Turkish literature. He was well versed in Sufi philosophy, especially that of Rumi, and, like Rumi, became a leading representative of Sufism in Anatolia on a more popular level.

### **Gürkan Çelik**

Currently preparing a doctoral dissertation on Gülen's views on peace and the human condition from the perspectives of education, dialogue and theological anthropology at Radboud University, Nijmegen. (MA in policy and organization studies at Tilburg University in the Netherlands.) He has written articles for learned journals, and is (co-)author of several publications, including 'Gülen's Approach to Dialogue and Peace' in The International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations (2007); 'Fethullah Gülen as a Servant Leader' in International Journal of Servant-Leadership (2007); Voorlopers in de Vrede [Forerunners for Peace] (2005); Hizmetkar Liderlik [Servant Leadership] (2003).

### **Kate Kirk**

Currently writing a doctoral dissertation, at Queens University, Belfast, on Dutch integration policies and their implications on citizenship practices. (A graduate in social science, University College Utrecht; MA in political science, Leiden University.) Ms Kirk is also doing research on social problems in a deprived neighbourhood in Amsterdam for the Wiardi Beckman Foundation (WBS), the Dutch Labour Party think tank. She has recently published 'Enlightened Embodiment: the Submissive Islamic Female Body in the Contemporary Dutch Enlightenment Project' in The International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations.

### **Yusuf Alan**

(MA in English translation and interpretation at the Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey.) Editor at Time Media Group in Rotterdam. Some publications: Aktif Dusunme ve Yenilenme [Active Thinking and Self-renewal] (Rotterdam: Libertas Media, 2001); Sozun Gucu [The Power of Discourse] (Rotterdam: Libertas Media, 2003).