

Book Reviews

Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance

M. Fethullah Gülen

New Jersey: The Light, Inc., 2004. 269 pages.

This book presents the thoughts of M. Fethullah Gülen, one of the world's most influential Muslim scholars today. His ideas are attractive to many people because they give guidance on how to combine Islamic values with contemporary demands. Moreover, his emphasis on interfaith dialogue has earned him an international audience from various religious backgrounds. Thus, Gülen's movement has spread rapidly throughout the world with schools, cultural and media activities, and dialogue projects.

This book is a compilation of Gülen's writings, interviews, and speeches that address such contemporary topics as interfaith dialogue, jihad, Sufism, and education. Moreover, it is among the first to address the timely issue of dialogue among civilizations. The book clearly presents Gülen's understanding of such a dialogue as a deliberate undertaking based upon love, dialogue, and tolerance among people of different backgrounds. Readers who are not familiar with the context of these ideas in Turkish history, however, may find it difficult to follow the flow of some of his ideas.

Gülen proposes dialogue for mutual enrichment and sharing as a solution to the "clash of civilizations" (p. 257), stating that the Abrahamic religions, especially Islam, are against disorder, treachery, conflict, and oppression (p. 256). His model is based on people dedicating their lives to thought and activism for the sake of God and creation.

Both Muslims and non-Muslims can benefit from this book. The author reminds Muslims of Islam's teachings on dialogue, using the Qur'an and the Hadith to show that tolerance, love, and compassion have been the main Islamic values throughout Islamic history and signify the importance of "reflecting God's Mercy on themselves." It may also help certain non-Muslims move beyond their prejudice, distrust, and misinformation and arrive at a deeper understanding of Islam. Gülen engages non-Muslims in

a discussion of dialogue by expressing the values of Islam, which are shared by many religions.

The first two chapters analyze the Islamic values of love, mercy, forgiveness, tolerance, and dialogue. The author connects love with belief in God and states that love of God is the essence of everything, the purest and cleanest source of all love. God is the source of all compassion and love, and these values flow to people's hearts from Him. Any human relationship develops in accordance with the individual's relation to Him (p. 11).

He explains the terms *faith* and *believer* and the qualities of a believer according to Islam (p. 136). Based on this information, the dynamics of Gülen's movement can be understood. Believers are not concerned with life's difficulties, for they believe this life to be transitory in comparison with the eternal life of the Hereafter. Their faith carries the spiritual seed of heaven and endows them with power and enlightenment (p. 138). Believers are like friends of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and thus use their understanding of the Qur'an to solve life's questions and difficulties as well as to shed light in areas of darkness.

Gülen addresses the issue of jihad and states that Islam is based on forgiveness and tolerance. Regrettably, many non-Muslims do not share this perspective. Especially since 9/11, the West has strongly criticized Muslims for not condemning terrorist attacks. Gülen answers these criticisms, analyzes the reasons for the lack of an Islamic response to terrorism, and proposes education in the Islamic world as a solution. Commenting on recent terrorist attacks, he explains how people who fail to grasp the true spirit of Islam cannot strike a balance between the broader and finer points of the Qur'an. In fact, this inability may lead to a misinterpretation of Islam (p. 180). He further argues that since the Qur'an is based on forgiveness, tolerance, and respect for humanity, no Muslim who understands Islam correctly can be or become a terrorist. He claims that any terrorist activity, no matter by whom or for what purpose, is the greatest blow to peace, democracy, and humanity (p. 261).

The author argues that in true Islam, terror does not exist. He supports this with examples from Islamic history. For example, even in a time of war, the hadiths mandate respect for non-Muslims: "Do not touch children or people who worship in churches." He further states that, according to Islam, war cannot be declared by individuals, organizations, or groups, but only by governments (p. 184). The rules of war and peace in Islam are very clear (p. 185). Islam respects all individual rights and states clearly that none can be violated, even if doing so would benefit the community.

Qur'an 5:32 further declares that one who takes a life unjustly has, in effect, taken the lives of all humanity, and that one who saves a life has, in effect, saved the lives of all humanity (p. 261).

Gülen argues that there is no such thing as an Islamic world; rather, there are individual Muslims living according to Islam around the world. Today, Muslims are separated from one another by divides that inhibit a gathering of minds to discuss and solve current problems and develop a vision for their future in the context of the world and of all creation. He concludes that because there is no Islamic world and no one understanding of Islam agreed upon and approved by qualified scholars, everyone acts individually.

For Gülen, the three most dangerous enemies of Muslims are ignorance, poverty, and internal schisms. He proposes education as a solution, suggesting that in today's global world, education is the best way to serve humanity and establish dialogue among civilizations (p. 198).

This book provides an important forum for dialogue among civilizations from a Turkish Muslim perspective. The author succeeds in presenting a strong case, based upon primary sources, for tolerance and compassion in Islam. It offers a concise overview of the Hadith that is both appropriate and useful for understanding the precedence of interfaith dialogue in Islamic teachings. This book is necessary reading for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It provides a convincing argument, based on the Qur'an and the Hadith, that Islam not only permits but also encourages interfaith dialogue. For non-Muslims, it may serve as a gateway to understanding the Islamic perspective on contemporary issues.

Yetkin Yildirim
The Institute of Interfaith Dialog
Austin, Texas