

**Tamer Balcı & Christopher L. Miller. 2012. *The Gülen Hizmet Movement: Circumspect Activism in Faith-Based Reform*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. viii+302 pp.**

Due to the wide range of the Gülen Hizmet Movement's (GHM) activities in various areas from education and media to interfaith dialog and human relief organizations, this research project, deserves our close attention. Moreover, this project is an interdisciplinary effort presenting expanded versions of presentations made at the conference ("Peace through Faith-based Grassroots Organization? Exploring the Gülen Movement" held at the University of Texas—Pan American on March 27, 2010) and extended to enlist other interdisciplinary and comparative essays in an effort to present a more holistic understanding of the GHM. The organizers were conscious of the increasing significance that Islamic organizations are assuming in a globalizing postmodern and postcolonial world, as well as the risk of conflict that might arise in such a world. Thus, all submitted chapters went through a rigorous double-blind review process, and only the ones approved by the referees are presented to the readers of this book as follows:

The Gülen Hizmet Movement: A Cautionary Tale – intro chapter by Tamer Balcı and Christopher L. Miller;

Chapter One: The Oratory of M. Fethullah Gülen by Adem Akıncı;

Chapter Two: Fethullah Gülen's Vision for Peace through Education and Dialogue by Süphan Bozkurt and Yetkin Yıldırım;

Chapter Three: Islam and Democracy in the Thought of Nursi and Gülen by Tamer Balcı;

Chapter Four: Islamic Mediators and Creators of Grassroots Demands: The GHM Compared to the MB Egypt and MB Jordan by Sonia L. Alianak;

Chapter Five: Among the Heavenly Branches: Leadership and Authority among Women in the Gülen Hizmet Movement by Maria Curtis;

Chapter Six: The Genius and Vulnerability of the Gülen Hizmet Movement by Mark Webb;

Chapter Seven: The Gülen Hizmet Movement and Secularization Theory: Explaining the Improbable by Christopher L. Miller;

Chapter Eight: Pursuit of Piety in the Public Sphere: A Weberian Analysis of the Gülen Hizmet Movement by Semiha Topal;

Chapter Nine: Is Genuine Interfaith Dialogue Impossible? Alasdair MacIntyre and Fethullah Gülen in Conversation by Thomas D. Pearson;

Chapter Ten: An Analysis of the Gülen Hizmet Movement's Interfaith Dialogue Activities by Mustafa Ruzgar;

Conclusion: Interdisciplinary Inquiry and the Gülen Gestalt by Christopher L. Miller and Tamer Balcı;

supplemented by works cited, list of contributors and index included as well.

The purpose of this book is to elaborate the issue of coexistence between Islam and democracy, as

well as peaceful accommodation with the West as proposed by the GHM, a progressive religious movement that has long suggested solutions to the contemporary questions of the Middle East. M. Fethullah Gülen (1941-present), the founder and spiritual leader of the GHM, was arguing for the compatibility of Islam and democracy long before the Arab Spring was on the horizon. As is well known, the GHM is a modern Turkish-Islamic movement which functions in many areas from education, media, and healthcare services to interfaith and intercultural dialogue. As Gülen's ideas have evolved since the 1980s, so the movement has become global in scope. According to the editors of the introductory chapter, one defining characteristic of the GHM is its open acceptance of modernism and Gülen has grasped the modern age's mass communication and education structures well. Unlike ordinary imams, Gülen encouraged his adherents to open schools instead of mosques. He regarded learning and teaching as two divine duties of an individual, and incorporating the term *hizmet* allows for reflection upon overlapping features shared by the GHM and the earlier Nur Movement, from which the GHM borrowed greatly (movement led by Bediuzzaman Said-i Nursi).

Born in Erzurum, in eastern Turkey, in 1938, M. Fethullah Gülen is an Islamic scholar and thinker, and a prolific writer and poet. He was trained in the religious sciences by several celebrated Muslim scholars and spiritual masters. In addition, he studied the principles and theories of modern social and physical sciences. Gülen retired from formal teaching duties in 1981, having inspired a whole generation of young students. His efforts, dating from the 1960s, especially in educational reform, have made him one of the best known and respected figures in Turkey. Among his main ideas are the following: inter-cultural dialogue, inclusive civilization, appropriate universal education, respect for the rights of others, democracy as the only viable political system, the necessity of interfaith dialogue.

While Gülen has been extremely circumspect in guiding the GHM through the murky waters of Turkish politics by setting cautious levels of involvement, this has not entirely blunted efforts by critics of this organization. However, Gülen's intervention has spared the GHM from any serious missteps that might have further subjected the organization to denunciation by critics. It should be mentioned here that the variety of GHM activities, such as interfaith dialogue dinners, luncheons, panels, and conferences held in one location do not always resonate with those organized in other locations because they are often designed to meet specific local needs.

It may be that the editors are right in their expectations:

“Given the current atmosphere in Erdoğan's Turkey, we might expect for the GHM to become less circumspect and to transform itself into a more open activist organization along the lines of existing NGOs.”

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