

ISLAM

AND PEACEBUILDING

Gülen Movement Initiatives

Edited by

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CHAPTER 8

Fethullah Gülen's Theology of Peacebuilding

Zeki Sarıtoprak

O Lord, You are peace and peace comes from You.

Give us, our Lord, a life full of peace.

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him)

INTRODUCTION

Our world has become a global village where people are more interconnected than ever. Technological progress continues at an amazing speed. The emergence of human beings' awareness of their place in the universe increases their sharing in one another's happiness and sorrow; this consciousness is unique to our time and carries risks as well as benefits. No nation or ethnicity in the world can claim complete isolation, even the most simple of societies. As a result of increased interaction and access to faster channels of communication, human beings have greater need than ever for the maturity of mind and spirit to coexist peacefully. However, in contrast to the high speed of technological development, the building of human relationships appears to be slower than ever. Where greater communication should foster real relationships between members of the human family, today's world instead faces conditions in which two-thirds of the world's population suffers

from interpersonal violence and war. In this paper, I will examine a sampling of Fethullah Gülen's theological views on peace and peacebuilding, and the roots of these views in the Qur'an. This does not claim to be an exhaustive study of Gülen's writings on peace; rather, it is a theological study of the Qur'anic foundations of his thought.

PEACE IN THE QUR'AN

Building peace among human beings is the most important task, though one of the most difficult of all, required of the human family. Peace is one of the names of God (*al-Salam*). Many Muslims name their children Abd al-Salam (the Servant of Peace) after this divine name. It is a responsibility of human beings to live peacefully in order to make the entire world a reflection of the divine name, Peace.

The Qur'an makes many references to peace. Muslim scholars have cited many of these Qur'anic verses in their writings on peacebuilding. The Arabic root word for peace is *s-l-m*, which carries connotations of both "peace" and "submission." The words "Islam," "Muslim," "Muslimun" (plural), and "Salam" all come from this same root. The word "Salam" is used many times in the Qur'an, for example, when describing the quality of the servants of God, who are defined by their peaceful response to insult: "The servants of God are those who walk on the earth modestly, and when certain foolish people address them, their answer is 'salam'" (25:63). That is to say, even if they are insulted they do not respond to evil with evil. This principle is also emphasized in the following Qur'anic verse: "When the servants of God pass near negative behavior, they pass by with dignity and kindness" (25:72).

Considering the violence in today's world, and the proliferation of weapons capable of rendering the human family extinct several times over, it is urgent that both Muslims and adherents of other religions follow the instructions of the Qur'anic verse for human relationships: "Peace is better" (4:128). Even in the midst of war,

on the battlefield, if there is an opportunity for peace, the Qur'anic injunction is "if the enemy inclines towards peace, you should incline towards it too" (8:61).

PEACEBUILDING AND THE BEGINNING OF ISLAM

The very beginning of Islam was marked by successful peaceful resolutions to ongoing conflicts. The Prophet was known for his non-violent response to violence and persecution in Mecca. His peacebuilding skills became so well known that he and his followers were invited by the leaders of the city of Medina to build peace among rival tribes that had been fighting for centuries. Under his leadership, a peaceful society was successfully established in Medina, and later, even in Mecca.

One example of the Prophet's peacebuilding is the famous story of the black stone, in which he solved a dispute among several Arab tribal leaders in such a way that all were able to equitably share in the same moment of honor. On another occasion, the reconciliation of two individuals took precedence over even the Prophet's prescribed daily prayer. This occasion is recorded in certain Islamic references which indicate that Abu Bakr led the prayer in the Prophet's absence.

The importance of peacemaking in early Islamic tradition can be deduced from the presence of an entire book on the Prophet's sayings about peacebuilding in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the most authentic collection of the sayings of the Prophet. One, for example, tells the story of the Prophet making peace between two individuals fighting over a debt owed:

Once, Allah's Apostle heard the loud voices of some opponents quarreling at the door. One of them was appealing to the other to deduct his debt and asking him to be lenient but the other was saying, 'By Allah I will not do so.' Allah's Apostle went out to them and said, 'Who is the one who was swearing by Allah that he would not do a favor?' That man said, 'I am that person,

O Allah's Apostle! I will give my opponent whatever he wishes,'
(Al-Bukhari 1953, Hadith 868)

HUMAN SOCIETY AND ISLAMIC VALUES

Scholars of peacebuilding have developed principles that are considered critical to coexistence and mutual cooperation, which are also referred to directly or indirectly in some Qur'anic verses. These are: recognition of human dignity, understanding of the common origins of all human beings, the consideration of diversity as positive, the acknowledgment of other religions, the awareness that judgment belongs to God alone (which occurs on the Day of Judgment), and finally the need for Muslims to practice good deeds. They should deal justly and equitably in their interactions with others (Fahmi 1993 cited in Abu-Nimer 2003, 73).

The Islamic view of human society is based on the principles of harmony, knowledge, justice and peace: wars and violent actions, while part of the history of every major world religion, have no place in the essence of Islam. The Islamic understanding of Paradise is based on peace; in fact, Paradise is called *Dar al-Salam* (the Abode of Peace). Peace is such a central notion to Islam that the very greeting among the people of paradise is Peace, or *Salam* (10:10). The righteous will be told, "Enter paradise peacefully and safely forever" (15:46). Muslims in their daily greetings use the same language: *as-salamu alaikum*, or "peace be with you." Muslims are exhorted to try to make this world as similar as possible to the ideal life of Paradise.

Despite this ideal goal, the Qur'an acknowledges the reality of human nature and the possible conflicts that may arise between peoples. However, it constantly encourages believers to incline towards peace in any situation of dispute. First of all, all human beings should assume the responsibility to make peace, in accordance with the divine principle "Fear God and make peace among yourselves" (8:1). A similar Qur'anic verse speaks of the responsibility of political authorities to make peace and stop violence if it occurs: when

fighting occurs between two rival groups, it is incumbent upon the Islamic authority to make peace between the two. The Qur'anic verse says, "If two groups of believers fight against each other, make peace between them. If one party does wrong to the other, you fight that which does wrong until it returns to the ordinance of God. If it returns, make peace between them justly, and act equitably; God loves the just" (49:9). The verse clearly suggests that it is a compulsory duty for adherents of the Qur'an to prevent any aggression if they are able, a duty that requires the intervention of a third-party as mediator to resolve conflict. The verse has been cited by some scholars to justify the use of violence in Islam and thus to refute the pacifist hypothesis. However, other scholars argue that "the passage clearly supports the concept of mediation and fair and just third-party intervention" (Abu-Nimer 2003, 62).

Since God has placed no limitations on the devastating capacity of human anger, building peace is one of the most difficult tasks for human beings. It requires steadfastness, resolve and patience, which are considered prized values in Islam and essential elements for peacebuilding strategies. "Control of emotions and listening to the way of rational thinking are considered essentials to peacebuilding" (Abu-Nimer 2003, 65). It is a long process, and it may take generations to build worldwide peace. The Qur'an encourages peace-builders in this struggle by reminding them of the eternal rewards they will receive. Even if they are not fully successful, still they will be rewarded for their works, and therefore they should not lose hope while working for peace; even the angels in paradise will greet such peacemakers with joy. "Peace be with you," they will say, "because of your patience in the life of the world" (13:24).

Two main principles upon which Islamic civilization is founded are mutual cooperation and the loving interrelatedness of creation. The first principle is one that scholars of peacebuilding refer to as "collaborative action" and "solidarity." According to this principle, the planet depends on the mutual cooperation of all creatures helping one another: rain helps grass to grow; grass helps animals

to grow; and animals help human beings to grow. This provides an example for human beings. That is to say, "All human beings have a common origin in God, who created them all equal. Therefore, they should assist one another and not neglect one another's needs" (Abu-Nimer 2003, 73). This principle finds its root in the Qur'anic verse, "[...] Help one another in what is good and pious, not in what is wicked and sinful" (5:2). The second principle insists that all members of creation be considered brothers and sisters. This principle requires all human beings to reject anything that does damage to this essential relationship; therefore, in Islam all forms of chauvinism (including racism and nationalism) are unacceptable. Therefore, communal solidarity is one of the goals that Islam puts forward as a principle.

Some scholars suggest that the five pillars of Islam have a direct relationship to the work of peacebuilding and non-violent action. *Shahadah* indicates obedience to God and the Prophet; the five daily prayers teach discipline; *zakat* provides social solidarity through compulsory charity; fasting trains people to be patient and selfless in times of difficulty and suffering; and the *haji* creates unity and friendship between members of the community through pilgrimage. These pillars of Islam provide the necessary elements through which one is prepared to make peace and to accept peace (Abu-Nimer 2003, 45; see also Sadha-Anand 1993).

RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Nowadays, as mentioned above, the majority of the world's population suffers the effects of global conflicts and wars. The victims are mainly the vulnerable: children, women and the elderly. The world experienced history's most devastating war just decades ago, and there is fear that history may repeat itself. The major European cities were in the midst of intense bombing. According to one account, as many as 35 million people were killed during World

War II. Enlightenment and civilization did not help to prevent the leaders of the "civilized" world from engaging in such destruction.

When reflecting upon the world wars, the global community agrees, "never again." However, the current trend of our world is unfortunately not peace-oriented; indications are that we are headed for worse destruction than our world has ever seen. Therefore, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of all other religions should make every effort for the dominion of peace.

PEACEBUILDING IN GÜLEN'S THOUGHT

In the Islamic world one can see important efforts in this direction. Fethullah Gülen was named the world's most influential intellectual in 2008 in a survey by *Foreign Policy* magazine. As elaborating on Gülen's biography is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that Gülen's passionate pursuit of a theology of peace began at a young age, in an era when anarchy and chaos were dominating Turkish society. Marxist and nationalist groups were in armed conflict with one another. More than 10,000 people in Turkey were killed in two decades during these clashes. Even families were not immune to this violence and tragedy; members of the same family could be found fighting on opposite sides of the conflicts. Gülen made great efforts to extinguish the fire of conflict amidst this chaos, and his faith-based efforts had a significant impact on building peace between rival groups. Gülen, in an interview with Safa Kaplan in Istanbul's *Hürriyet*, 21 April 2004, says the following concerning his continuing theology of peace:

When anarchy was everywhere in our country, I called for calmness and controlling of anger. I had received death threats, yet I called upon... to continue working for peace, "If I am assassinated, despite all your anger, I ask you to bury my body and seek order, peace and love in our society." Regardless of what happens, we believers should be representatives of love and security. I continue saying the same today.

While Gülen did not directly intervene to stop the armed conflict, his educational efforts have equipped millions of young people with religious and moral values that have prevented them from engaging in such conflicts. Gülen believes that the new generation should be equipped with qualities such as wisdom, compassion, faith and knowledge.

It is a tradition among Turkish intellectuals to work for the creation of an "ideal generation." For example, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, the writer of the Turkish National Anthem, chose the name Asım as the proper name for the ideal generation: the "Generation of Asım" (*Asım'ın Nesli*). Bediüzzaman Said Nursi spoke of the "New Generation" (*Nesl-i Jadid*; *Nesl-i Cedit*, in Turkish). Necip Fazıl Kısakirek, another prominent Turkish poet and author, idealized his generation as the "Faithful Youth Generation" (*İmanlı Gençlik*).

Gülen, having read the work of his predecessors, examined his own generation and found the lack of proper education to be the essence of the problems the young people faced. Through his writings and encouraging the founding of educational institutions, he has attempted to help develop such a generation, for which he has coined the term "the Golden Generation" (*Altın Nesil*). The aim of the Golden Generation idea is to provide a perfect education for a perfect generation in order to obtain a perfect society. The Golden Generation also requires the young people of the community to show a great respect for religious and national values. Gülen hopes that a lasting peace can be achieved through the work of a generation which is peaceful, made up of individuals who are living examples of peace, who will build bridges of dialogue and mutual understanding to make peace among people. To Gülen, the Golden Generation has certain specific qualities: knowledge, faith, love, idealism, altruism, and action (Ağai 2002, 27–47, see also Ağai 2003). In the last decade, when some political scientists spoke of a "clash of civilizations," Gülen ardently urged the building of "breakwaters" in order to prevent such a clash.

It is not an exaggeration to assert that Gülen's theology through such endeavors has, and will continue to have, a global impact on building peace. Gülen's philosophy of peace and his efforts are not isolated instances in Islam; in fact, as briefly mentioned above, the entire heritage of Islam is the foundation of Gülen's understanding of peace. He counts among his role models, certainly, mystics such as Hasan al-Basri and Abu-Talib al-Makki; scholars and mystics such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, Jalaluddin Rumi, Ahmad Sirhindi, and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi; and most importantly the companions of the Prophet. One can argue that if any of these Muslim personalities had lived in our time, they would be involved in the same work as Gülen.

EDUCATION AS PEACEBUILDING

Contemporary scholars of peacebuilding have elaborated on certain elements that are essential for making peace in any part of the world. Two of these elements are education and knowledge. There is no doubt that Gülen's greatest efforts and contributions are related to these two fields. Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, in the beginning of the twentieth century, stated that "there are three major enemies of Muslims: ignorance, poverty, and internal division (Nursi 1996, 1921). If we take a closer look at our modern world, we can easily understand the importance of education, particularly for Muslims, who constitute 22 percent of the world's population. Population growth is faster among Muslims than any other population, while literacy rates remain significantly low (Ahmed 2005). Gülen considers lack of education to be a disease requiring a cure; his efforts are an attempt to cure the disease.

Today in Turkey, Central Asia, and many other parts of the world, the educational institutions that were established by Gülen Movement participants have continued to contribute greatly to the education of people of different religions and ethnicities. In fact, his Golden Generation has already contributed, through

educational endeavors, to the building of peace in many areas of conflict, including the Balkans, northern Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Philippines.

Thomas Michel, in an article about Gülen, describes his own visit to a school established by Gülen Movement participants on the Philippine island of Mindanao. Michel visited an area of the island where kidnapping, guerrilla warfare, and armed conflict were constant between Moro separatists and the Philippine state. Michel states, "The school [the Philippine-Turkish School of Tolerance] offers Muslim and Christian Filipino children an excellent education and a more positive way of living and relating to each other" (Michel 2003). Michel (2003) found in the school students from all backgrounds and described it as a "haven of peace" in this region of conflict.

My own experience echoes that of Michel's. I visited Skopje, Macedonia in the summer of 2004, where I had the opportunity to visit a school established by some Turkish businessmen who were supporters of the Gülen Movement. I was told that when civil war was going on in the region, members of many different ethnic groups were sending their children to this school. Their parents were fighting one another, but the children were living peacefully under the roof of the same school. This same situation is true also in educational institutions established in other areas of conflict, such as Iraq and East Africa.

IBN KHALDUN AND GÜLEN

In order to contextualize Gülen's peacebuilding theology, I would like to draw upon the famous fourteenth-century Muslim sociologist Ibn Khaldun's understanding of peacebuilding. In Ibn Khaldun's philosophy, individual efforts and sacrifices remain essential for building peace. He suggests that peace in society is possible through the willingness of an individual to subordinate himself or

herself to the group. Without this, peace and social development are not possible (Ibn Khaldun 1958).

Ibn Khaldun addresses the development of urban society in the term *asabiyya*, or "group solidarity," in a way which empties the term of its original connotations of racism and nationalism, both of which are prohibited in Islam. I would like to borrow this term from Ibn Khaldun to indicate solidarity around a value or an idea that is shared by members of society. Gülen's "Golden Generation" exemplifies Ibn Khaldun's idea of the establishment of peace in society. Gülen considers peacebuilding as a sacred task. One can compare people who contribute to the activities of this movement to those who go to Friday prayer. Just as people perform their prayer as a sacred duty without being asked to do so, people are also coming together to build peace. In other words, people think that the activities of the movement positively affect society and their spiritual life. Therefore, many want to be part of these activities. This togetherness between people is not based on emotion; rather, it is based on shared values. Following this theology people come together around a particular ideal; therefore, the effectiveness of the movement is not solely attached to the charismatic leadership of one person. Gülen, for example, insists that the movement should never be dependent upon his personality. This approach will guarantee that the movement will continue beyond the death of its founder.

Gülen's theology of peace is based on the integrity of the individual; his approach to social restoration and peacebuilding, therefore, is one of "bottom-up" social change. It should be noted that Ibn Khaldun's concept of *Asabiyya* carries its own risks of an excessive group loyalty, which can be dangerous for a harmonious society. Gülen, by emphasizing the quality of individuals, believes that the Golden Generation should be able to practice and spread justice and compassion in their societies. Therefore, his ideal Golden Generation is based not on ethnicity, but on moral and ethical dimensions. There is no doubt that compassion and justice are two important components of peacebuilding. Compassion requires justice. In

Islam, a person is always encouraged to forgive even when his or her rights are violated. Therefore, while the individual's right to seek retributive justice is retained, restorative justice is the preferred response. Gülen in his theology of peace describes his ideal generation as a "selfless people, sincerely thinking of others rather than themselves." He says:

Who knows? Maybe in the near future some selfless people, who sacrifice themselves to make others live, will unite hearts and minds through their efforts. Conscience and logic will become two different, deeply rooted dimensions of their lives that will complete each other. Physics and metaphysics will abandon the fight between themselves: in order to give the opportunity for the beauty of everything to express itself in its own language, each will return to its own field. These selfless people will discover the interconnectedness of the divine command and the laws of nature. People will repent of their previous meaningless fights with one another. An atmosphere of serenity will be built and be felt in homes and in schools. No dignity will be stepped on. Hearts will be full of respect to the extent that no one will trespass on the property or the dignity of others. The powerful will act justly so that the weak and the poor will have a chance to live humanely. No one will be arrested just because of an assumption. No one's house or business will be attacked. No innocent's blood will be shed. No oppressed person will cry out. Everyone will love human beings as a duty towards God. It is exactly this time when the world, which is a corridor to Paradise, will become a paradise-like place that will always be enjoyed (Gülen 2006a, 110).

He strongly advocates selflessness and living for others as the most essential qualities of the builders of peace. He calls them "devoted souls" (*adâmlı ruhlar*). Selflessness has enormous potential in the building of a sustainable peace. Selflessness helps those who dedicate themselves to peace better understand the situation and sufferings of victims. This eventually brings about a collective approach, which "allow[s] victims of injustice to exert influence and power over the other side" (Abu-Nimer 2003, 75). By living for others, Gülen believes that the ideal individual should always

prefer the advantages of others over his or her own. This is in fact a description of the believers in early Islam, the companions of the Prophet. The Qur'an says of them that "they prefer others over themselves even if they are in need" (59:9). Without a generation with similar qualities, Gülen, like Ibn Khaldun, argues that peace would not be possible. This is why he constantly emphasizes the need for faithful and selfless individuals to dedicate themselves to the establishment of peace. In Gülen's theology, educational institutions should serve to bring up such individuals from the realm of imagination to the realm of realization. It can be argued that all of Gülen's educational efforts work towards this goal.

HOPE AND LOVE

Despite the overwhelmingly negative and violent state of the world, Gülen remains hopeful about the future of humanity. He believes that the efforts to build peace in the world and attempts to create a harmonious society will bear fruit. This great hope is exemplified in the following statement:

Once, despite obstacles, through the teaching of the Qur'an, an enduring love, respect, and dialogue were achieved. These days, I have full faith that through the efforts of these *lovely people* a new atmosphere, new understandings and dialogue will be achieved. Even now, through the *migrants* who carry this idea around the world, the rivers of love have started to flow. Now they are heard in every corner of the planet. The breezes of tranquility and happiness have started to be felt. And in every corner of the world, they are creating *islands of peace* for stability and harmony (Gülen 2006a, 111).²⁷

According to Gülen, his ideal Golden Generation will always think of positive steps to build peace. His Golden Generation will not be distracted by historical mistakes. He would say, despite some negative historical experiences like the Crusades and colonization, "We

²⁷ My emphasis.

are resolved not to remember those events and not to give an opportunity for the rebirth of animosity. We strongly encourage the confining of historical mistakes within the limits of the history books so as not to resurrect feelings of animosity between people" (Gülen 2006b, 158).

Describing his ideal generation further, Gülen says, "Everyone in their capacity is like an apostle of revivalism carrying in their hands the flowers of friendship, on their lips the songs of brotherhood. Their tongue, which takes its essence from the eloquence of the Qur'an, is stronger than any sword. Their words are afterlife-oriented. These words shatter darkness without harming anyone" (Gülen 2006a, 112).

In Gülen's ideal world "there is no bullying, no greed, no quarrelling, no distrust, no lies, no oppression, and no deception. On the contrary, there is chivalry, tenderness, the efforts of revival, the love for life, kindness and dialogue, respect for truth, trust, acknowledgement of kindness and generosity, the spirit of righteousness, justice, and the following of the straight path" (Gülen 2006c, 88-92). In Gülen's theology such an ideal generation can be an important instrument for establishing such a world of peace where "people love love and hate hatred" (Nursi 1996, 1930). Gülen compares hatred to a destructive flood which destroys trust among segments of society. This hatred brings baseless accusations against the people who strive for peace. Through hatred, words can be taken out of their context and even the most innocent statement can be used against an individual (Gülen 2006a, 75).

"LIGHTING CANDLES" THROUGH THE MEDIA

One must acknowledge that building global peace is not an easy task. It requires patience, an important Islamic virtue that is repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an.²⁸ It also requires the sacrifice of indi-

²⁸ For example, see 2:45, 2:153, 2:177, 2:250, 3:200, 8:46, 11:11, 16:126, 14:12, 31:17, 40:55, 42:43, and 46:35.

viduals. Gülen suggests that individuals who dedicate themselves to working for humanity and building peace have to be patient and uninfluenced by the trend of hasty and sloganeering politics.

Gülen's own experience indicates some of the political difficulties that peace builders face: in the 1990s, when Gülen promoted dialogue between different ethnicities and adherents of different religious traditions, both some extreme secularists and some extreme Muslims opposed him. Eventually, he left Turkey for the United States, for medical reasons, but also to avoid this conflict.

Gülen compares his opponents in Turkey to the Kharijites of early Islam, saying, "Similar to the logic of Kharijites, this destructive group destroys everything positive; like an anarchist under the control of hatred and revulsion, they attack everything. They run from one wilderness to another, destroying the bridges of understanding and making the roads of dialogue impassable, causing despair in the loving spirits and injecting violence and hatred into hearts that beat with love" (Gülen 2006a, 75-82). These thoughts express his deep concern and fear for the future of peace in his own country.

Even in the midst of great fear and concern, Gülen remains hopeful that the efforts to build peace will eventually be successful. His hope grows out of his own experience: at one point, the media and the secular elite of Turkey pronounced him *persona non grata* to the extent that his life was threatened.²⁹ As a result of this experience, he later worked to develop a media presence that would "light candles" of hope for believers in his community. Gülen was aware that any theology, in order to communicate successfully, must have access to the media. Those who opposed him had this access and were able to communicate their own theological and social ideologies in ways which, Gülen believed, damaged the hope and faith of the people.

It is the duty of the ideal generation, he says, to enlighten people rather than sulk in darkness. For this reason, during the 1980s,

²⁹ For the details of Gülen's feelings, see Gülen 2006a, 75-82.

the Gülen Movement worked towards the establishment of a newspaper and later a television channel. Both projects became highly successful both within and outside Turkey. Through these, as well as through monthly and weekly journals, the Gülen Movement successfully established a powerful media presence, communicating a consistent theology of peacebuilding (Barton 2006). In an era when the media is dominated by conflict, violence and shifting values, Gülen's media presence offers a powerful theological corrective.

THEOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS AND COMPASSION

In Gülen's theology of peacebuilding, there is no place for revenge. Despite the hardships that Gülen has faced during a process of legal accusations, spiritual persecution, and exile, he has never sought revenge. "We are going to respect our character," he says. "We will not harm those who persecute us. We will not seek an eye for an eye. We will never curse them. We will not break hearts, and in the manner of Yunus [Emre, the famous fourteenth-century Turkish poet], we will invite everyone to love.... As a believer, I promise that I will never shun any person, and I will not persecute those who have transgressed against me" (Gülen 2006b, 217).

Scholars of peacebuilding consider forgiveness a cherished virtue in Islam and an essential for peacebuilding. Gülen sees forgiveness as one of the indispensable qualities of his Golden Generation. Therefore, according to him, the most important gift for the coming generation is to teach children how to forgive. Gülen states, "Today's generation's greatest gift to their children and to their grandchildren is to teach them how to forgive even the most offensive behavior and nauseating actions" (Gülen 2006d, 77). He calls forgiveness a "heavenly medicine" that can cure the many wounds of society.

For Gülen, another effective element with which to build peace is love. He considers love to be an effective "weapon"; he embraces this weapon of love against all violent actions:

In a time when people are defeated by their sense of revenge and animosity, when the masses are driven into struggles and wars, when truth is silenced before force, when those who wield power behave as tyrants against those who disagree with them, when dictators and oppressors are applauded and promoted, while the oppressed are treated badly, we once again say: love. I believe that love has the capacity to change the rhythm of our life (Gülen 2006c, 113).³⁰

According to Gülen, once one is equipped with love and compassion, there will be no difference between "you," "we," and "others." Gülen considers love an essential element of his theology of peacebuilding. He says, "We need love and compassion more than water and air" (Gülen 2006a, 184). Gülen describes those who love others and live for others as heroes. He says, "Happy are those who make love their guide in their journey. How unfortunate are those who do not perceive the love that is grounded in their spirit and who spend an entire life blind and deaf" (Gülen 1997a, 98).

Fehullah Gülen, who is unmarried and lives simply, has no worldly possessions.³¹ Gülen has renounced the material benefits that could come from activities inspired by his teaching. Gülen's tremendous compassion for all people allows him to feel the spiritual benefits of building peace. Such spiritual benefits can be felt by anyone who builds peace through compassion.

In the tradition in which Gülen was raised, his understanding is that no matter how small, every creature praises God in its own tongue (17:44), and therefore deserves its proper respect and compassion. Gülen says:

Compassion is the beginning of being; without it everything is chaos. Everything has come into existence through compassion and by compassion it continues to exist in harmony.... Everything

³⁰ For further reading on Gülen's understanding of love for human beings, see Gülen 2006b, 34–38.

³¹ He has made it clear that he never made an intentional vow of celibacy, but just never married because it "never happened." He does not uphold lifelong celibacy as an Islamic value.

speaks of compassion and promises compassion. Because of this, the universe can be considered a symphony of compassion. All kinds of voices proclaim compassion so that it is impossible not to be aware of it, and impossible not to feel the wide mercy embracing everything. How unfortunate are the souls who don't perceive this.... Human beings have a responsibility to show compassion to all living beings, as a requirement of being human. The more one displays compassion, the more exalted one becomes, while the more one resorts to wrongdoing, oppression and cruelty, the more one is disgraced and humiliated, becoming a shame to humanity (Gülen 1996, 40-42; see also Gülen 1997b, 90-95).

In fact the above statement from Gülen reflects the Qur'anic teaching of compassion which is necessary for solving the contemporary conflicts and bringing peace to our world.

CONCLUSION

As an ardent student of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, Gülen has developed his theology of peacemaking based on the Qur'anic principles of peace and the examples of early Islamic history. What gives us hope, after a discussion of Gülen's thought, is that Gülen's influence on public opinion has been significant through his powerful media presence and work in education. His influence is deeply rooted in the best theological traditions of Islam, consistently referring to themes of hope, love, compassion and forgiveness. These are essential elements to any faith-based peacemaking activity. The world is blessed to have such a strong personality as Gülen calling so forcefully for the establishment of peace in a world that is suffering deeply as the result of conflict.

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