

RELIGION AS A CONDUIT TO DIALOGUE - THE CASES OF U. HABERMAS, K. ARMSTRONG AND F. GULEN

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Today many ideas that informed the development of all the European thought during the time of Renaissance came under the scorching fire of Post-Modern critique. One of these ideas is the idea of the Perpetual World Peace. One of the last Enlightenment ideas to linger in the mind of modern thinkers is that of dialogue as interaction instituted on the basis of well-respected humanness of its parties. Here the importance of religion transpires, for it was religious understanding of generosity and mercifulness that formed a good deal of the Enlightenment discourse on the fundamental unity and loftiness of humanity. In Islam, these ideas are considered to form the very bedrock of morality. Also, the very cornerstone of any religion is compassion. Thus, ways for intercultural dialog become wide open for all of humanity, with not only secular scientists, but also religious activists becoming a sensible driving force behind it.

Key words: dialogue, compassion, intellect, modernity, interaction, manifestation, intuition, “Mythos”, “Logos”.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the most prominent thinkers of humanity have ever been eager to stress, the most fundamental of humanity’s calamities is ignorance. “The evil that is in the world almost always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence if they lack understanding” – famously has held Albert Camus. “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance” – stated Socrates. The project of Enlightenment, launched by the Europeans some few centuries ago, undertook it on itself to undermine ignorance and supplant it with knowledge that would lead humanity’s way to happiness in both worlds. The core of this knowledge came to rest on the so-called “logos” part of our natural make-up, namely, our “the pragmatic mode of thought that enabled people to function effectively in the world” (Armstrong: 2009: x-xii). Religion was deemed as something all-too-emotional, naive and out of synch with the modern spirit of bold inquisitiveness about the very essences of all things. Religion was rather devolved to represent a culture of so-called “mythos” culture, a kind of “primitive psychology”, “designed to help people negotiate the obscure regions of the psyche, which are difficult to access but which profoundly influence our thought and behavior” (Armstrong 2009: x-

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xii). Then, a whole series of bloody wars of an unprecedented scale, unending ecological crisis and the volume of compartmentalization of life never to be seen before made people speak about the total failure or “death” of this “Logos” culture. Indeed, this marked the death of modernity itself and the birth on its wrecks of the so-called “post-modern” culture based on nihilism, relativism and agnosticism. In the teeth of the crisis, some voices arguing for a measured return to religion as an efficacious way to handle the post-modern people’s problems, started arising. Some other powerful voices made a case for the “modernity project being yet incomplete” (like J. Habermas), and showed some possible ways to modify its course in such a way that it could bring the long-cherished happiness to this perturbed world. The article went over 3 prominent representatives of such voices and sketched the essences of the suggested solutions. Remarkable enough, all of them envisage communication and dialogue as a key part to their solutions, assuming a priory that it is only the successful communication of people that can eliminate the all-times archenemy of ours, that is, ignorance. All of them presuppose humans to be intrinsically good and open to be edified by learning from each other’s ways. All in all, nowadays it is of a paramount importance to realize that dialog activities can be pursued not only by academics of the secular mind-set, but by people of religion as well. Fethullah Gulen’s ideal of the necessary loving acceptance of everyone as he is, Karen Armstrong’s empathic Charter of Compassion, Jurgen Habermas’s concept of the Communicative Action as opposed to the Self-Assertive Action - all these can be and have already become valuable and inspiring contributions into reviving one of the key aspirations of the Enlightenment, namely, perpetual world peace.

2. METHODS

The following research methods have been used in the article: hermeneutical and linguistic analysis, induction and deduction methods. Various scientific works and articles pertaining to different thinkers of the world have been made use of, with special attention reserved to those ones that concerned the idea of dialogue and communication between different nations and cultures. The research starts with the analysis of Jurgen Habermas’s ideas concerning the dialogue issue. Then a place is given to the ideas of Karen Armstrong. By highlighting the chief ideas of the two thinkers and the main criticisms leveled against them, the authors show that the position of Fethullah Gulen, whilst enabling him to make a great use of the modern knowledge and take into consideration the aspirations of the modern people, is much more in line with the spirit of traditional religions. Analysis of both hermeneutical and field data allows the authors to elucidate the place the notion of dialogue can have in the modern world as well as to elaborate on ways the latter can be implemented in real life. Through the method of deduction, the conclusion is made.

3. RESULTS

All of the thinkers underscore the necessity of a non-coercive, other-regarding, and, thus, altruistic approach to the dialogue. The core element of such dialogue seems to be the willingness of the participants to stay at least at one remove from their direct self-preoccupation or prejudice for the sake of arriving at some common truth or understanding in which everyone concerned can partake, or, to put it differently, to let go of their self-interest in order to be “melted away” in the outpour of some over-arching ideal that turns out to be binding for everyone involved.

3.1. The reasons driving the participants into such “melting”

The reasons can range from obeying the religious imperative as in the case with Gulen, to abiding by the principle of rationality as in the case with Habermas, to feeling compassion towards others as it is the case with Armstrong. Ideally, the affection of religion and rationality of philosophy get conflated in this approach, making it really difficult to designate Gulen as a solely religious thinker or Habermas as a dry rationalist. As it is seen on the examples of these thinkers, religion can well catalyze the adherence to the Golden Rule to its best, and philosophical “Logos” can well lead the way to a genuine concern for others that can be called “love” or “sympathy”. Still, while Habermas’ rationalistic scruples about the impartiality seem to be rather idealistic by nature and are yet to pass muster set by the skeptical-minded post-modern philosophers, the religious approach seems to be more acceptable due to its appeal to the more irrational “Mythos” part of humans’ psyche. Habermas himself accepts that there is something to the religious discourse that lacks in any secular one, for it is in religion that there are “indispensable potentials for meaning preserved in religious language” (Habermas 2002: 77, 162).

3.2. Much of Western history of ideas owes to its religious past

Habermas notes how much Western history of ideas owes to its Christian past as far as the ideas of “responsibility, autonomy and justification; history and remembering; new beginning, innovation, and return; alienation, internalization, and incarnation; individuality and community” are concerned (J. Habermas & J. Ratzinger: 44).

3.3. Religion informed the secular political and moral philosophies of Europe through different precious ideas

It was religion that informed the secular political and moral philosophies of Europe through such a precious idea as that of human beings being created in the image of God, which enabled the thinkers to set up a discourse about equal dignity and respectability of all humans (J. Habermas & J. Ratzinger: 45); thus, religion evinced its capacity to talk about the truths of human life relevant for all.

3.3. An important distinction between Karen Armstrong and Fethullah Gulen's ideas

Here a caveat must be made here about an important distinction between Karen Armstrong and Fethullah Gulen's ideas. For Armstrong, in its true sense, religion is always associated with the ineffable; she claims "Religion was not supposed to provide explanations that lay within the competence of reason" (Armstrong 2009b). The truly Islamic "Weltanschauung" does not tend to rift the world into dichotomies and binary oppositions, perceiving the intellectual and emotional sides of humans as complementary, interfusing modes of the one single reality. Rather, the functioning of the heart and all the emotions and intuitions concomitant serve therein as a crowing completion of the perfunctory conclusions our mind fumblingly makes when encountering the Ultimate Reality issue (Budiyar, May-June 2011).

3.4. Heart and intellect are one and the same in the Islamic world-perception.

As the famous Islamic scholar Said Hussein Nasr holds it, in Islam "The heart is not simply identified with sentiments which are contrasted in modern philosophy with reason. Man does not possess only the faculty of reason and the sentiments or emotions, which are contrasted with reason. Rather, he is capable of an intellectual knowledge, which transcends the dualism and dichotomy between reason and emotions, or the mind and the heart, as they are usually understood... Just as the rational faculty of knowledge is not opposed to the sensual, the intellectual and intuitive are not opposed to the rational" (Nasr, Winter-Spring 1979).

3.5. It is the synthetic and inclusive approach that can help alleviate the misgivings most people of the post-modern epoch have about religion.

Gulen's and Armstrong's synthetic approaches can well help alleviate the fear most people of the post-modern epoch feel when they speak about religion, namely, the fear that comprehensive religious outlook may somehow end up excluding any care for the non-religious or even becoming totalitarian. On Gulen's interpretation, the Islamic discourse on love and compassion seems to be not only congruent with J.Habermas's attempt to reform the modernity project, but even improving on it by showing that the powerful religious imperatives can well be utilized to eliminate from the communicative action any genuine coercion and partiality; the ideas of Armstrong seem to charter nearly the same course apart from her being (as she herself coins the term) a "free-lance monotheist" as such unable to fully represent the mainstream tenets of any of the main monotheistic religions.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Jurgen Habermas - one of the most influential philosophers of the so-called “Frankfurt school”

4.1.1. *The “communicative” and “strategic” types of rationality*

Jurgen Habermas, who is one of the most influential philosophers of the so-called “Frankfurt school” of social theory, being sometimes even called “Germany’s intellectual conscience” (Outhwaite: 6). He is rather optimistic about the ability of today’s humanity to overcome the consequences of the ever-growing urbanization and modernization processes thanks to such an important constituent of the modernity culture as the pure rationality or, to put it into the parlance of K. Armstrong, the pure “Logos”. For him, the single-minded concern of modernist societies to pursue only individual practical goals and the attendant loss of meaning may well be supplanted by another type of rationality – namely, *communicative* one (Brand: x). According to his famous book “Theory of communicative action” (1981), in social relationships any type of coercion is reprehensive and, as such, should be totally relinquished. Intrinsic intelligence of social actors and their willingness to freely and honestly communicate with each other should guide them to a kind of consensus beneficial to all members of society (Frances Sleap & Omer Sener: 120). Furthermore, this communication ought to take place in the so-called “public sphere”, that is, political institutions, cafeterias, newspapers and magazines or, to generalize, all mediums in which citizens may apply themselves to untrammelled conversation on “matters of general interest” (Habermas 1989: 136). Otherwise, people never will be able to prevent the public sphere from winding up in the clutches of state and media (Frances Sleap & Omer Sener: 122). Ordinary citizens must maintain their active role in democracy; the only way for them to do this is to stay one step back from having their immediate concerns defended through some social action, which will enable them to get clearer understanding of claims made by other interlocutors (Frances Sleap & Omer Sener: 122).

He clearly distinguishes between the so-called “communicative” and “strategic” speeches. The first one is intended to achieve some personal goal and usually implicates affecting the decision-making of other participants through such methods as threatening or promising; the second one pursues the goal of attaining mutual understanding and clarifying the definitions by virtue of the participants being true, exact and genuine toward each other (Habermas 1984: 286). According to Habermas, human beings are intrinsically predisposed to the second type of speech, the strategic one being parasitic on the communicative one and preventive of the mutual understanding (Habermas 1984: 287). He contains that “in communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize

their plan of action on the basis of common situation definitions” (Habermas 1970: 163). Participants are expected to be objective, consistent, lucid, outspoken and as open-minded as to accept criticisms laid at their doors by anyone possessing the relevant competence (Frances Sleaf & Omer Sener: 125-126). Nevertheless, Habermas is quite realistic about the impossibility of this pattern of discourse to be employed to any satisfying effect in the modern society, the genuine means of attaining the agreement “being repeatedly thrust aside by the instruments of force” (Habermas 1990: 106).

Other two important notions he deploys in his book are “material” and “symbolic” reproduction. The first one is a continuous production of items to meet humans’ material requirements, and the second one is human culture and social mores. The strategic speech-based action, being efficient in all-to-complex social life, is helpful as far as the first notion is concerned, and the communicative speech-based action, being creative and edifying, is pivotal as far as the second one is concerned. However, this symbolic reproduction has been for long “colonized” by set of cool-blooded, bureaucratic policies susceptible to the vested interests of powerful social actors and organizations of corporate capitalism. Knowledge has become too compartmentalized due to the existence of different scientific or law fields and their inability to keep in close contact both with each other and the general public (Brand: 41). For Habermas, all these organizations could and should be reformed in order to live up to the “communicative” speech ideal, not the least role in this reformation to be played by various social movements and organizations run independently of the unhealthy ways of the capitalist system.

4.1.2. The difficulties Habermas’s theory faces and its practicability

One of the most important criticisms leveled against Habermas’s ideas are the difficulty of their implementation due to their all-too-idealistic character. All in all, as the French philosopher Michel Foucault points out, all human beings “are colored by inequity”, the power struggle and strategic action included (Flyvbjerg: 33). Furthermore, human beings cannot always be rational; there is emotional side to them totally uncontrollable by the dictums of the “communicative speech”. He even goes as far as to presuppose active participation in the process of a psychotherapist who would predispose the intentions and mindsets of the participants toward objectivity and impartiality! In fact, the ideal situation to communicate with each other without any coercion is not likely to happen at all, for, when making a decision, we can hardly ignore the power balance relevant to our environment and, thus, not espouse some sort of ideology or prejudiced attitude (Oh: 16-20). Nevertheless, many civil organizations all over the world have drawn on Habermas’ theory when developing their projects for improving the weal of their relevant societies in the field of development communication. Though unrealizable to the fullest, the ideals of Habermas can significantly facilitate the

process by at least having people oriented toward reasonability, mutual respect and sincerity. For instance, the idea that the domination of the speech by experts or scientists should be somehow obviated, while their knowledge put to use by social actors, has been instrumental for many activists (Frances Sleap & Omer Sener: 133). In particular, the theory has been utilized to analyze proceedings and evaluate results in a population program held in Nepal and aimed at educating people about family planning. Validity of the claims, expectations and distribution of the opportunities for people to speak their mind without coercion – all these factors have been scrutinized through the prism of the theory, the additional use of it being made when analyzing mass media campaigns and communicative workshops for health professionals (Jacobsen & Storey: 106). Another field where the theory can be deployed is the way healthcare workers communicate with patients on the topic of lifestyle changes. In spite of the doctor-patient relationship being unavoidably unequal, such principles of the theory like sincerity, respect, reflection upon norms, and readiness to change one's mind on being convinced have proved to be of great asset (Liv Tveit Walseth & Edvin Schei: 85).

4.2. Another philosopher of dialogue - Karen Armstrong

4.2.1. Compassion as the major driving force behind dialogue

She is a popular British writer on religious topics, whose sphere of interest includes history of world religions and biographies of the important religious figures. A former Roman Catholic nun, she writes about religion from the standpoint of her personal spiritual experiences, never failing to highlight the importance of interfaith and intercultural dialogue. After gaining a congratulatory first class honors degree in English Literature from Oxford University, she became engaged in broadcasting and professional writing (Armstrong 2011: endpaper). Her most famous book is *A History of God (1993)*, where she conducts an in-depth analysis of three Abrahamic religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Up to now, she is author of 16 books, featuring primarily history of world religions (Armstrong 2011: endpaper). She is renowned by many as a 'major contributor to interfaith understanding and respect' (Enlightennext.org: 2012), and has received 100 000 \$ award as a winner of the annual contest held by the well-known non-profit organization "TED" ("Technology, Entertainment and Design"). The latter has also supported her current project "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life" which features compassion as the key value of all world religions (Frances Sleap & Omer Sener: 22). In 2011 she was given the "National Encyclopedia's International Knowledge Award" "for her long-standing work of bringing knowledge to others about the significance of religion to humankind and, in particular, for pointing out the similarities between religions. Through a series of books and award-winning lectures she reaches out as a peace-making voice at a time when world events are becoming increasingly

linked to religion” (Jartelius: 2011). According to Armstrong, compassion is a key-value as far as any interfaith dialog attempt is concerned, being “an attitude of principled, consistent altruism”, the foundation stone of which is nothing but empathy towards other people and their views (Armstrong 2011: 6). In her opinion, the so-called “Golden Rule” or “Do to others as you would want them to do to you” principle has been absolutely indispensable in lives of such prominent religious figures and philosophers as Socrates, the Buddha, Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him!). For her, compassion is not something that is given us “by nature”, but that which can well be brought into bloom through practice and effort (Armstrong 2011: 17).

4.2.2. The Socratic idealism as the telos of Armstrong’s dialogic attitude

Socrates’s ideal of dialog looms largely in Armstrong’s ideas. For her, modern people value aggressive, self-assertive style of speech, the primary goal of which appears to be the desire to carry the day, outdo the opponents and gain some material profit, but not the attainment of truth. She is sure that conflicts and social rifts characteristic of today’s world are not to be eased by that style of speech. It is only when one is aware of his own inability to know the essences of things that he can converse with others with gentleness and no malice whatsoever, can dialogue clearly and considerately, aiming at nothing but mutual understanding and empathy. To the Socratic dialogic discourse to be primed to let the results and ideas attendant upon the dialogue to change our attitude diametrically or to relinquish even the most long-held biases of ours is of paramount importance (Armstrong 2011:122). Dialogue should become a “communal meditation”, a “spiritual exercise”, enabling people to willfully and mutually plumb the innermost recesses of their intellects and, thereof, be “taken beyond themselves” by contemplating the ultimate essences of things or, to put it in the Platonic parlance, “the world of ideas” (Armstrong 2009c:68). To Armstrong’s thought, the friendly and polite approach to each other, with interlocutors yearning not for thrusting their own cause, but earnestly endeavoring to learn from each other, is something that exemplifies not only the Socratic manner of dialog, but that of the Buddha and Confucius as well (Armstrong 2011: 122-123, 130). Furthermore, we should attune ourselves toward listening to each other as well as should trust the person with whom we are dialoging; otherwise, we will “dismiss the speaker as irrational, nonsensical and basically inhuman” (Armstrong 2011: 122-123, 130), thus annulling any opportunity to be engaged in a really genuine exchange of ideas. As it was mentioned, she makes out a particular case for the compassion principle, saying that it is mostly compassion that allows other people’s ideas to work their way into our hearts and minds and earn us new insights (Armstrong 2011: 26). Also, Armstrong insists upon us cultivating a concern not only for those endeared to us, but for the whole of humanity. Proceeding from a Qur’anic verse, she speaks of ‘the essential unity and equality of the entire

human family' and our "responsibility for *all* our neighbors" throughout the world (Armstrong 2011:133). Great use of empathy as the "ability to use your imagination and put yourselves in others' shoes, opening yourselves to their concerns and their sufferings" (Armstrong 2011:82) must be made as well, for no dialog can proceed without real mutual understanding between people. Being searching but respectful even toward those whose standpoints are morally obnoxious, "We should start from where they are rather than where we think they ought to be", thereby coming to be well-positioned for gaining personal insights about our own misunderstandings as well as the sufferings the opposite side much possibly goes through (Armstrong 2011: 171). On this occasion, she gives the example of the Buddha, who advised a king complaining of his self-preoccupation to start reforming himself through reflecting on his self-regard and realizing that others attend to themselves just as he does to himself (Armstrong, 2011: 123).

4.2.3. Armstrong's ideas as real-life projects

The Charter of Compassion is Armstrong's last "compassionate" project which she is funding by the money she has gained as a "TED-winner". She holds that "we urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries" (Armstrong 2011: 5). Up to now, thousands of people have contributed their ideas about the contents and aims of the project, with numerous leading intellectuals and religious personalities expressing their approval of and readiness to sustain it. Eventually, the charter had been completed through the work of the "Council of Conscience" – a team of such prominent religious thinkers as The Grand Mufti of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Sheikh 'Ali Jum'a, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Sister Joan Chittister, and Rabbi Awraham Soetendrop (Frances Slep & Omer Sener: 30). Dialogues on compassion and ways to spread it continue all over the world online and through groups of people reading and discussing the "Twelve steps to a Compassionate Life". There is also the so-called "Compassionate Action Network International" coordinating the relevant efforts and initiatives across the globe. Injustice, poverty, tolerance and many other issues are highlighted through the Network's activity. More than 80 cities have subscribed to a "Campaign for Compassionate Cities", through which numerous citizens come up with such activities as creative arts projects and mass volunteering drives. In Pakistan the Ali Hasan Mangi Memorial Trust helps Khairo Dero village become an official "compassionate village" equipped with new education, health and other facilities, as well as partakes in various social and arts initiatives related to compassion. 20 000 different dialog activities in the USA aim at facilitating dialogue about Muslims and Islam by showing films and other resources and cooperating with volunteer hosts organizing interfaith conversations in their local areas in order to

solidify the atmosphere of understanding, friendship and peace. Another example of dialogue activity inspired by Karen Armstrong is the Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group in the San Francisco Peninsula where American Jews and Palestinians partake in a Sustained Dialogue process and “continually learn to change strangers into friends and “enemies” into partners, moving from confrontation to collaboration and concrete projects to help people and the public peace process, here and overseas” (Frances Sleaf & Omer Sener:31).

4.3. A Turkish Muslim scholar, opinion leader and peace advocate Muhammed Fethullah Gulen

4.3.1. The progenitor of voluntary and civil-society based service with view to serve all of humankind

His ideas inspired an important transnational civil society movement. Born in 1938 in Erzurum (Northern East Turkey) in a family of a religious scholar, he acquired the traditional Islamic education and gained a state license to act as a preacher, but lately developed interest in modern sciences and literature. An inspiring spiritual persona, gifted orator, and author of more than 60 books, he has been able to persuade diverse strata of the Turkish people to partake practically and intellectually in the idea of “Hizmet” – “(voluntary and civil-society-based) service (to all humanity)”, firstly articulated by the great Turkish scholar and spiritual leader Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960), but lately somewhat modified by Gulen so that it might fit better with the latest developments of modern culture.

Though Gulen understands the Islamic religious sources in the light of such traditional trends of the Islamic thought and practice as the Sunni-Hanafi jurisprudence school and the Maturidi theology, he does not eschew to benefit from his profound knowledge of the best present scientific and philosophical paradigms, thus working out his own clear-cut, moderate, but authentically Islamic discourse on most issues facing today’s humanity. In fact, he accepts no pure “liberal”, “reformist”, or “modernist” approach, attempting instead at a neat re-evaluation of the Islamic religious texts against the backdrop of the current predicaments and achievements of humanity. In 2008 he was nominated by the Foreign Policy and the Prospect Magazines as “the most influential intellectual of the world”, for the influence of his ideas has reached out far beyond the borders of the modern Turkey to affect as much as 150 countries across the globe (Frances Sleaf & Omer Sener: 94). Although the connection between the followers of his ideas is loose in the physical terms, as far as their common partaking in the ideal of “Hizmet” is concerned, it is rather tight, which yielded numerous schools, universities, dialogue organizations, and charitable NGOs which are run throughout the globe and form the corpse of the so-called “Gulen Movement” (though Gulen himself shies from associating it with his name). Starting from Turkey and USA to

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina the movement welcomed people from different ethnical and religious backgrounds and played a significant role in mitigating inter-group tensions. It may well be defined as “a world-wide civil-society movement” interested in non-denominational education and intercultural dialogue projects and aiming at contributing to enduring peace and greater understanding. Starting from 1990s, Gulen initiated a number of dialogue organizations inside of Turkey that were able to bring the prominent representatives of the highly-rifted and mutually antagonistic social layers of the Turkish society together, thus setting up a new socio-cultural discourse within Turkey. A special role in the process was played by the Journalists and Writers Foundation organization set up by Gulen and his followers, under the umbrella of which numerous dialogue events have been held. Gulen himself has paid visits to religious and ethnic leaders of Turkey, such as the Patriarch of the Turkish Orthodox community, the Patriarch of the Turkish Armenian community, the Chief Rabbi of the Turkish Jewish community, and leaders of the Turkish Alevi community. He has even met with Pope John Paul II and the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel. All these meetings have eventually given a hand to the legitimization of different minority communities within the broader Turkish public sphere. In 2010 Gulen was awarded an honorary doctorate by Leeds Metropolitan University for his contribution to education, peace-making and intercultural dialogue processes. In 2011 in New York he was awarded an EWI (“the East West Institute”) Peace Building Award by the East West Institute for his contributions to world peace. A number of university chairs have been launched in order to study his teachings (Frances Sleaf & Omer Sener: 84).

4.3.2. Gulen’s synthetic thinking – no tension between either science and religion or intellect and emotions

Right from the start, F. Gulen did his utmost to steer via media between different philosophical, religious, and political schools of the past and modernity. His is the philosophy of the middle ground, idea that all opposites can be somehow reconciled through belief in One Single God. As he attempted at this kind of synthesis between science and religion, secular and religious worldviews, he did it with regard to dissimilar and even antagonistic political trends inside Turkey, namely, leftists and rightists, Alevi and Sunni, Turks and Kurds (Robert A. Hunt & Yuksel A. Aslandogan: 57). According to Gulen, it is dogmatic, prejudiced outlook that hampers people witnessing the genuine harmony and numerous common denominators existing between all things, inclusiveness and open-endedness being the hallmarks of his approach. For him, truly pious Muslims will combine in their conscience and deeds three pivotal concepts: openness to the scientifically and logically flawless understanding of the world, deep regard for the high spiritual and religious values and tolerant, amiable attitude towards other human fellows.

Keeping to these imperatives, such people are to accomplish never-heard successes in bringing together sets of approaches that are commonly conceived to be mutually antagonistic: “may he consider Nizam al-Mulk and Alp Arslan together, and Fatih and Akshamsaddin side by side; may he not separate Zenbilli from Yavuz; may he not forget Pascal in Ghazali’s illuminated skies. While whirling in Rumi’s magical words, he is not to neglect to pay a visit to the lab, so as to send his greetings to Pasteur. In short, he should accept the wholeness of body and soul as an emblem” (Gulen 2006b: 133-134).

For Gulen, dialogue is not only a means to bridge-building between communities and as such conduit to prolonged peace and safety of humankind, but is something deeply essential to the authentic Islamic sources. It is a must for today’s Muslims not as requirement of their human nature, but as an ever-living command of the Qur’an and Sunnah impervious to political grounds or the temporal frameworks of historical circumstances. This take of Gulen’s on the Islamic sources may well be named as a “dialogue theology” (Frances Sleaf & Omer Sener: 87). The basis of this take is somewhat epistemological, for it is nothing but the classical Islamic paradigm of the unitarian nature of the world. That is, to demonstrate a humanistic approach to every person and even to the enemy instead of hatred and ill-will is quite reasonable if it is taken into account that every “other” person is a manifestation of God’s Names and Attributes and has something to provide the one who interacts with him with. In this case the ontological value of any other person given would ensue from the epistemologically important fact – all of the world is not but a realm of God’s beautiful names manifestations (Heon Choul Kim: 520-547). The same truth is openly stated in the Quran: “Indeed We have created you from male and female and *made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another*” (49:13). It is not a “clash of antagonisms” of Hegel or Huntington, not a confrontation between “Logos” and “Mythos” approaches, but the harmony observable in all ways things exist. The genuine lover of God cannot even conceive that the All-Wise would create anything purposeless or trifle, or, in other words, something ontologically negative. If things are ontologically positive, then, by interacting with them one cannot but increase in knowledge of God and, as a result, love of Him. It is not an act of condescension with a somewhat pragmatic goal of preventing misunderstandings between people, but a skill that encourages a Muslim to see everything in a positive, intrinsically beautiful state – be this beauty apparent immediately or afterwards. Even if the interlocutor is different from a Muslim, the difference is ontologically legitimized by the Quranic verse “Each one acts according to his own manner. Your Lord knows well who is best-guided to the Right Path” (17:84) and “Had your Lord so willed, He would surely have made mankind one community. But as things stand, now they will not cease to differ among themselves and to follow erroneous ways except for those on whom your Lord has mercy. And it is for this exercise of freedom of choice that

He has created them” (11:118-119). Thus, those who are culturally “different” are invested with every right to exist and even flourish notwithstanding their origins.

4.3.3. *Gulen’s motto “To be a prosecutor towards ourselves, and an advocate for others” as recipe for open-mindedness*

As he writes, “Knowledge of God does not consist of abstract knowledge; in its true form, it is transformed into love. We cannot remain indifferent to someone in whom we believed and then grew to know well. After belief and knowledge comes love. Love is the crown of belief in God and knowledge of Him. Love is open to everyone according to his or her level” (Gulen, January-March 2006). Besides, this outlook would always lead one into intensive sense of humility, for if everything is created by God, everything, the humans included, is dependent on Him and as such can take neither personal pride in any good deed, nor pass any categorical judgments on other people, the final judgment being prerogative of none but God. So, by saying “Be a prosecutor towards yourself, an advocate for others” (Gulen 1997), Gulen virtually reiterates the Socratic motto “All I know is that I don’t know anything”.

We should be “advocates for others”, for, as humanity is the best pattern of creation, the most superb Divine theophany capable of reflecting through itself the Nature of God, it is incumbent on everybody to see any other human being as a polished mirror of the Creator’s love (Gulen: 2006a). A genuine Muslim is to “love and embrace everything, repel hostilities with love, and evil with good”, “thinking that the road that they are to follow is the road of not showing resentment, but rather that of patience and tolerance” (Gulen 2006a:264). If our dialogue reaches the point when we are not able to accept other persons’ views as corresponding to the essentials of our worldview, we should only realize that the unbecoming ideas of the other participant are not expressive of his very essence, namely, his humanness; rather, they happen to ensue from his transient, contingent and volatile attributes. For instance, we can dislike the attribute of untruthfulness rather than the untruthful person himself; in other words, we should love *him*, even we don’t like some of *his attributes* (Gulen: 2009). It is because of this attitude, sometimes called in Turkish as the “hoshgoru” (“empathic acceptance”), that a truly pious Muslim always ought to prime “a chair for everyone within his heart” (Gulen 2009.26.10). In other words, it is not a “man-centered humanism”, but a “God-centered humanism” which flourishes not only on the collective, but first and foremost on the individual level of human life (HeonChoul Kim). Another important point here is that not only the elite echelons of scholars or politicians should be constantly and consistently involved in such events, but first and foremost the grass roots of society. In fact, given to deep-seated prejudices, to have people dialoguing en masse can take a number of generations, but Gulen accentuates the necessity of striving in this direction by one’s doing everything he can so as to

uproot biases and incorrect perceptions lingering amongst people and thus to blaze the pathway for the following generations so that they may arrive at the real mutual understanding (Frances Sleaf & Omer Sener: 86).

To say the last but not the least, Gulen-inspired schools and universities, and, virtually, all types of organizations run by his followers are deeply associated with the following dialogic approaches: inclusiveness, readiness to extend compassion and love to all human beings regardless of the authentic Muslim identity that Gulen's most followers have, openness to new forms of engagements and projects, being dynamic but consistent, assertion of peace as the default position, focus on core social issues, attentive first and foremost on needs of the society within which the relative "Hizmet" organization is found (Frances Sleaf & Omer Sener: 94-95). Gulen succeeded in predisposing his followers towards these values by virtue of his ability to demonstrate that they are quite cogent as far as the very authentic textual sources of Islam are concerned. In his thought, dialogue is too important to be relegated to dialogue organizations alone; insofar as the dialogic culture is at the very core of the authentic Muslim lifestyle, all actions of all Muslims are supposed to be informed by it in the most deep way (Gulen 2004: 77).

5. CONCLUSION

The religious outlook should not be presupposed to indicate intolerance and bigotry. Quite to the contrary, as one can see it in the examples of F. Gulen and K. Armstrong, religion can be both practical and philosophical conduit to the inclusiveness and open-mindedness upon which any dialogic attempt turns. Addressing the innermost recesses of our being, religion has a long-cherished potential to improve the standing of matters as far as the unavoidable power imbalance between the interlocutors is concerned. Still, religion itself must be aided by the powers of human intuition and logical thinking so as to correctly articulate itself in the modern world. In fact, nothing prevents believers and non-believers from conjoining their forces through dialogue and have the Enlightenment ideals salvaged from otherwise imminent oblivion. Still, the brunt of ice-breaking seems to rest rather on the religious persons, for it is they who are supposed to have a fuller sway over their egoistic and egocentric desires thanks to the constant awareness of their's of their own imperfection toward God's absolute perfection. It is by removing their egocentric inclinations that people can avail themselves of the Habermasian "one remove" distance from their immediate goals and expectations - something without which any dialogue attempt is doomed to fail right from the outset. As for Habermas' ideal of people intellectually concurring on the possibility and even the inevitability of dialogue, it cannot but come about only secondly. Ideas of Gulen, proceeding from the traditional Islamic Weltanschauung and being not merely a brainchild of esoteric or philosophical interpretation of the Islamic sources, are apt to show the world a face of Islam of which many a today's observer is oblivious, and, as thus, are apt to

reinforce the dialogue and integration processes of all sorts between the whole bunch of things that apparently seem to be mutually antagonistic – religion and science, emotionalism and intellectualism, traditionalism and modernity, dogmatism and liberalism. Obviously, Gulen’s powerful voice, translating into well-established and successful educational projects all over the world, is well-entitled to be subjected to more detailed and expensive investigations of interdisciplinary character, for it seems clearly impossible to account for its scope and successes without serious re-consideration of the whole scientific picture of the world entertained by the today’s Western mindset.

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