Fethullah Gülen's Thought and Practice as an Attempt to Reconcile Islam with Secularism

Nazila Isgandarova, D.Min[1]

Gülen's discussion on issues of secularism and religion provokes conflicting understandings in Turkey and abroad. Many universities in the West sponsor symposiums on the contributions of the Gülen movement towards global peace, education, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and tolerance. The speakers and participants at these symposiumsattempt to depict a picture of the compatibility (or incompatibility) of secular and religious values in contemporary Turkey and their impact on the lives of Turkish Muslims.

FethullahGülen is a well-known Turkish Islamic scholar who has inspired an Islamic resurgence in Turkey since the 1950s. This is the time when Turkish society re-explored their Islamic identity after decades of the decline of Islam (1923-1950). Nonetheless, secularism is still the main identity of postmodern Turkey with its secular constitution, but there is a growing influence by moderate and liberal Muslims, and Islam continues to impact the moral standards on the Turkish population, 90 percent of whom identify themselves as Muslims. Meanwhile, despite the increasing importance of Islamic values on sociopolitical life in Turkish society, Turkey cannot be labeled as a fundamentalist or Islamic state because the following parameters of a secular society defined by D. L. Munby still exist in Turkey: the Turkish state is not a homogenous society, but pluralistic; it is tolerant of minorities; it declares the equality of all people, and so on.[2]

In Turkey, FethullahGülen is one of the important religious leaders who shape the new understanding of the relationship between secularism and religion. His interpretation of Islamic tradition paved a way for new key words in Islam, such as "pluralistic," "tolerant," "secular" and "scientific" Islam.

---

[1] Azerbaijani Women's Support Centre
[2] D. L. Munby, *The Idea of a Secular Society* (London, Oxford University Press, 1963), 14–32.

In order to understand Gülen's reconciliation with secularism or his attempt to reconcile secularism and Islam, it is first important to recall the fact that Gülen has never openly declared his support of the poltical ideas or platforms of extreme Islamists: he has always refrained from active political life and has focused instead on educational, social welfare and health care activities. Therefore, there are still some who label him and his group as "liberal conservatives…".[3]   Second, Gülen started his career as an imam, an offical religious employee of the DIB (the Directorate of Religious Affairs) and followed the code of conduct of the DIB according to article 154 of the 1961 constitution and article 136 of the 1982 constitution, which state that the DIB is "obliged to work for national solidarity and unity, and in accordance with the secular principle, to refrain from taking political positions".[4] As a state employee of the DIB, his responsibilties include explaining the issuing of fatwas (religious rules) by the DIB, speaking according to the official religious sermons, supervize the Qur'an courses and training courses, organzing pilgrimages and managing the mosqueassigned to him in Izmir. Moreover, Gülen has never approved of the wave of rampant racist nationalism or anti-Jewish and anti-western sentiments in Turkey.

Third, Gülen's movement or ideology was born to refute previous existing ideologies: his new interpretation of secular, pluralistic Islam is a response to the anti-secular movement among Muslims in Turkey. Gülen has always adhered to secular principles, and continues to do so - but with an emphasis on the grand history of Turkey, especially during the Ottoman Empire. This may be a reason why some people claim that Gülen's position between the values of the Ottoman Empire and Ataturk's secular values cannot be reconciled, since secularist religion is an oxymoron.

This paper is my own reflection of my personal experience of disappointment inthe thought and practice of ultra-secularists (or Kemalists) and ultra-Islamists (anti-secularists) in Turkey. I will first start with the definition of secularism and its historical and contemporary rise and spread in Turkey. Then, I will move to examine the importance of Gülen's interpretation of Islam which makes Islam compatible with secularism in Turkey.

---

[3]Ursula Spuler-Stegemann, "The Status of Islam and Islamic Law in Selected Coutries: Turkey" translated by Adam Blauhut, in *Islam in the World Today: A Handbook of Politics, Religion, Culture, and Society*eds. Werner Ende and Udo Steinbach(Carnell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2010), pp. 230, 221-240.
[4]Ibid, 233.

My aim is to reconcile Gülen's ideas of democracy, tolerance and equality with the realities of ongoing irreconcilable differences between secularism and religion through the examination of historical and contemporary factors in Turkey.

How has secularism developed in Turkey? How does Gülen understand it? How can Gülen be considered 'backwards' with his call for democracy, tolerance and equality for all? In general, I argue that Gülen's contribution to the debates between secularism and Islam moved the discussion into a whole new space, which is more peaceful and tolerant in the midst of a wide ideological spectrum on this issue.

Secularism vs. Islam

The Oxford Dictionary of Islam defines secularism as a political concept of the European historical experience, "which sought to remove coercive power from ecclesiastical authority and thus safeguard freedom of religion; separation of religion and state".[5] It was first coined in political life in 1851 by the British writer George Jacob Holyoake.[6] In Arabic, secularism is *'al-almaniyya*; it is derived from the word *alam* (that is, the world), referring to people who adhere to the worldly life. However, such a definition confuses the term with *dunyawiyya*, meaning temporal, in contrast to being *dini* (religious). The confusion of the terms affects the current status of secularism in Turkey; therefore the demarcation between religious and secular in Turkey is still not so clear. Strict secularists may apply it to public and political life, while reserving religion for private life: it is usual for some secular Turks to attend the Jum'a (Friday) prayer once a week or once a month, or practice KurbanBayram (in Arabic, Eid al-Adha; in English, Feast of the Sacrifice). The Prophetic tradition may also influence the understanding of "secular" Muslims, and there may be a secular aspect of attending the mosque. It is known that the Prophet Muhammad and early Muslims discussed community issues, including sociopolitical, economic and international problems, before and after the prayers in the mosque. The Prophet's Mosque or *'Al – Masjidun- Nabwi'* was the center of all the activities of the Muslims. The Prophet himself received international delegates there and allowed them to use the building as a place to stay.

---

[5] The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, *Secularism.* Available at:
http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2130?_hi=2&_pos=1).
[6] G.J. Holyoake, *The Origin and Nature of Secularism* (London: Watts and Co., 1896), 51.

However, the division between religion and secularism is lost in the midst of the divergent perceptions, beliefs and actions about secularism and religion. Therefore, some Muslim scholars attempt to bring some clarification to the application of secularism or religion in public and private life.

An Egyptian feminist scholar Margot Badran, for example, uses the term al-*'almaniyya la dini* (that is, secularism without religion) and *'almaniyya* (secularism within religion) in order to reflect the resentment of non-Islamist women for being labeled as "secularists and being negatively judged by (Islamic) co-religionists about their relationship with Islam, which they do not see as befitting a Muslim".[7] On the other hand, strict secularists label those who express their spirituality even in the private realm as "Islamist" or "religious". It seems to me that due to rigid and strict boundaries between secularism and religion in Turkey, both ultra-secularists and Islamists hold fears of the negative consequences of being associated with secularism or religion by arguing that religion and secularism are incompatible with each other.

Nonetheless, the ideal definition of secularism is a concept that promotes the freedom of religion, the freedom from religion, and equality for all. However, secularism is problematic in Turkey because it asserts favoring the secular as opposed to, or even violating, the religious rights of the majority in society. Therefore, secularism has acquired negative connotations in Turkey and is often criticized as being linked to anti-religious ideology that aims at removing religious values from the public sphere.

Development of secularism in Turkey and its influence over Islamic values and practices in society

The development of secularism is Turkey is mainly due to the reforms of Ataturk. However, the common view that it was Ataturk who introduced secularism to Turkey should be challenged. Secular ideas, mainly the separation of the religious institutions from the state and reducing their impact of state, had always been a hot topic of Islamic medieval and contemporary thought.

---

[7]Badran, 145.

The Status of Religion in the Ottoman Empire

Turkey, even during the Ottoman Empire, has never been a religious state. Ira Lapidusargued that secular states had existed in the Muslim world since medieval times.[8] Although the Ottoman sultans claimed the title of caliph, the ruler of all Muslims, they limited the role of religious personnel over the administration of the state.

For example, *şeyh-ül Islam* (in Arabic, *shaykh al-Islam*) did not embody the actual power in the state and never held power like the Roman Catholic Pope. As a state employee or a member of the Sublime Porte, *şeyh-ül Islam* was appointed by the Sultan and was on the payroll of the Empire. During later periods of the Ottoman Empire, the religious authority of *şeyh-ül Islam* was even more limited: the institute of *şeyh-ül Islam* became a fatwa department under sole control of the Grand vizier.[9]

The limited role of religious personnel in state affairs goes back to the time of the Umayyads, when Muslim theologians distinguished between matters of *din* (religion) and *dawlah*(state); however, they were still influential in guiding the public to Islamic values. As Oliver Roy points out, "a defacto separation between political power" of sultans and emirs and religious power of the caliph was "created and institutionalized ... as early as the end of the first century of the hegira [hijra, that is the migration of early Muslims from Mekka to Medina]", what has been lacking in the Muslim world is "political thought regarding the autonomy of this space".[10] After the 10th century, we see the decline of the political power of the caliphs and an increase of their "religious"authority vs. their "secular" authority. The new image of the caliph dictated that the caliphate was necessary for the validation of official acts based on the shari'a.[11] The caliph's main religious function was to defend the Islamic community against its enemies, institute the shari'a, and ensure the public good (*maslaha*).

---

[8] Ira M. Lapidus,"The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society", International Journal of Middle East Studies 6 (1975): 363-385.
[9]Spuler-Stegemann,"The Status of Islam," 231.
[10]Olivier Roy, The Failure of Political Islam, translated by Carol Volk (Harvard University Press, 1994),14-15.
[11]William Montgomery Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought (Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 1998).

The legitimacy of the "religious" authority of the caliphs was "symbolized by the right to coin money and to have the Friday prayer (*Jum'ahkhutba*) said in his name".[12]

Religion and Nationalization and Modernization in Turkey

With the rise of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk since the war of independence (1919-1922), Turkey witnessed a complete secularization. Ataturk's top priority was "to constitute the new Turkish nation-state as a secular republic based on European models and to liberate it from the chains of backward-looking religious functionaries".[13]

Secular reforms since 1923 lasted for more than a decade, aiming to diminish the role of religion to a private sphere. At a result of a series of secular reforms, the new Directorate of Religious Affairs (DIB) or *Diyanet Işleri Reisligi*took over the role of the office of the *şeyh-ül Islam*and was only responsible for "monitoring religious literature and overseeing theological offices and professions".[14] The responsibilties of all jurisdictions removed from the shari'ah courts to the Justice Minister and the Swiss civil code became the backbone of the civil law. Moreover, Arabic as a language of the Qur'an and a unifiying element of the *ummah* (the Muslim community worldwide) lost its privilege to Europeam languages, especially French, and the Arabic script was replaced with the Latin alphabet. Religion classes, which were still practiced in European and North American countries, were comletely wiped out from the high school curriculum. The reforms also banned certain Islamic practices among Muslims; for example, Sunday became the weekly holy day replacing Friday (the holy day of Muslims). Furthermore, the convents (*tekke*) amd mausoleums (*turbe*) of the powerful dervish orders (*terikat*) with an excuse of producing love and appreciation for the Ottomon Empire and a reaction against the secular system. Many shaykhs of these tarkiats were either persecuted or sent into exile.[15]

One of the reforms that affected the life of Turkish Muslim women is the Hat Law (or *kılıf-kiyafet* kanunu in Turkish) in 1925 that banned turbans and fezzes and required men to wear European headwear, and required women to take off their black chadors.

---

[12]Roy, The Failure of Political Islam, 15.
[13]Spuler-Stegemann,"The Status of Islam," 225.
[14]Ibid, 225.
[15]Ibid, 226.

Nonetheless, Atatürk's shari'ah reforms in 1925 also improved the status of women: first of all, polygamy was declared illegal and women were granted more freedoms in marriage, including easy divorce. However, religious marriages (*imam evliliyi*)still co-existed along with civil marriages.[16]

Nonetheless, it seems Turkish society did not approve the extreme measures against religion as a framework of moral standards in society. The majority of Turkish Muslims internalized secularism as a foreign ideology and culture. This may be a reason why the Turkish people have favoured conservative political leaders since the1950s. For example, Adnan Menderes, whom Gülen calls a hero (*kahraman*), became the Prime Minister of Turkey (PM) with the support of the majority of religious Turks; although a more lenient approach to Islam during this time could be also explained with the attempts to use Islam as an ideology against the spread of communism from the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, the majority of Turks were tired of the status quo, and contested the religious discrimination they experienced. Even the persecution of Menderes did not halt the Turkish population, who were able to elect a PM or political party that represented them. This may be a reason why after Mederes, Turgut Ozal, Necmettin Erbakan and Recep Tayyib Erdogan gained favour in the sight of Turkish Muslims. All of these leaders belonged, either directly or indirectly, to religious/spiritual orders - Ozal, for example, and his family had strong ties with Nakshibendi Sufi order.

Nonetheless, their success in elections where they gained the majority of the votes was also interpreted as a threat to the secular values of Turkey, even though none of these political leaders or their parties claimed otherwise: instead, the majority of Muslims in Turkey since the 1990s assimilated the principles of liberalism to Islam, and a new "brand" of liberalism - "Islamic liberalism" - appeared as the main idelogy against the socialist and ultra-conservative elements in society with the promise of democracy and the multiparty system. Those who adhered to Islamic liberalism declared that they recognized secularism and never held any aspirations or goals to replace the secular legal norms with religious ones in the legal system, social and political life, etc. However, even these secular declarations did not stop persecution against them: like the majority of Turkish citizens, these leaders were also subjectedto discrimination for their religious views.

---

[16]Ibid, 226.

Erdogan, for example, was sentenced to prison for reciting a religious poem while he was mayor of Istanbul. Unfortunately, it seems that it was Turkey's fate to endure a military riot (1960, 1971, 1980) after each democratic reform that relieved Muslims from being subjected to discrimination.

Gülen's Attempts to Reconcile Islam with Secularism

Gülen cannot be called "backward" with his attempts to reconcile Islam with secular values in Turkey. He joins the rank of many progressive Muslims who call for the internal development of shari'ah, especially by emphasizing the aspects of shari'ah that deals with human rights, including ethnic and religious minorities, and women in Turkey. His presentation of Islam is "modern" (some claim it "liberal"), especially when it is taken into consideration that he avoids any demand that Islamic law be the foundation of the state and the public sphere. However, he has been misunderstood by certain segments of Turkish society, especially by the Kemalists (or ultra-secularists) and the anti-secularists (ultra-Islamists).

As Professor AtillaYayla points out, among other groups (including extreme Islamists who are suffering from stagnation or regression), the Kemalists (or ultra-secularists) are the worst performing of them all: "During the last 20 years, no prominent Kemalist intellectual, academic or columnist has emerged to bring vigor to the Kemalists or challenge their rival groups. The Kemalist thought is gradually bleeding out, becoming archaic and anachronistic".[17] What are the main points of the Kemalist thought? First of all, they label religious leaders of Turkey as anti-Atatürk and see conservative Muslims as backward in many ways. In their accusations against the anti-secularists in Turkey, secularists accuse the latter group of encouraging the stagnation of modernization in Turkey. Second, they lay the foundations of their claims, especially discrimination against Muslims, to a higher authority: this authority for them is solely Atatürk.

The criticisms of anti-secularists against the Kemalists, on the other hand, are founded on the arguments derived from the Hadith, sayings or actions of the Prophet Muhammad. These small segments of Turkish society present the shari'ah-based past as an ideal past. What these anti-secularists forget is that many Islamic practices changed as their context changed.

---

[17]AtillaYayla, "Abuse of authority and clash of ideas," Today's Zaman, August22, 2012. Available at:http://www.todayszaman.com/news-290602-abuse-of-authority-and-clash-of-ideas-by-atilla-yayla-.html.

For instance, many conservative Muslims in Turkey today give preference to solving their family issues within the modern family laws of Atatürk rather than shari'ah, which is a remade product and material practice of Muslims after the Prophet Muhammad.

However, the majority of Muslims, including Gülen, admit that Muslims, unlike the past generations of IbnSina, Farabi, IbnKhaldun, etc., are not progressive in terms of technology, science, education and theology.

Today many Muslims gradually come to the point of believing that shari'ah-based cultures are the traditional patriarchal culture, not the Prophet's desired culture. The former is fixed and unchanged, but the latter is responsive to ideological and technological changes of time. As Fatima Mernissi points out, when Muslims lost the prophetic spirit and became satisfied with the stagnant shari'ah instead of reviving it, they slowly lost the spirit of time and suffered from *a mal du present*.[18]This means that by refusing to develop the shari'ah Muslims lost the ability to survive the challenges of time and sought ways to flee from the present to the past.

Fazlur Rahman also criticized the traditional Islamic legacy for its closing of *ijtihad* doors and *taqlid* (blind imitation) for the decline of shari'ah and gradually the decline of Muslims. He points out that the development of Sunni Orthodoxy with its claim to be true or original Islam has also a share in this underdevelopment of *ijma* as static and backward-looking.[19]

As a founder of modern Turkey,Atatürk,in the midst of debates of secularism vs. Islam or shari'ah,long ago realized the stagnation of the shari'ah and started a revolution with the intention of reforming Turkish society and making it competent in relation to the West. Atatürk's revolution was not against Islam, but against the ignorance and backwardness of Muslims, which prevented them from progressing in many areas of life. He wanted to cure and heal the Ottoman empire, the "sick man of Europe", a nickname that had been used to describe the Ottoman empire, which had been experiencing political, economic, spiritual and religious impoverishment since the 17th century.

---

[18] See Fatima Mernissi, The *Veil and The Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1991).

[19]See FazlurRahman, *Islam*(University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1966).

Atatürk's political, economic, social, and other reforms and ideas slowly but steadily gave fruit not only in political life but also in social and educational life, As in any political reforms, Atatürk's reforms also had mistakes that caused the misunderstanding of his legacy by later generations (both by ultra-secularists and anti-secularists), which accepted his reforms as an elimination of Islam in public under the religious reforms.

Some people argue that Atatürk's legacy resulted in bank interest, family planning, a change in the roles of sexes in society, state tax vs. the collection of *zakat*, and so forth.

For them, these reforms moved Muslims in Turkey away from Islam and the demand for bans against freedom on bank interest and family planning, revising the status of women (contra the modernist), reinstating the forced collection of *zakat*, and so forth – things that would particularly distinguish Muslims from the West; however, as Rahman points out, the more they fought to distinguish themselves from the West, the more they were haunted by the West through repulsion.

The "Islamist" elements of Turkish society are paranoid regarding Western influence on Turkish Muslims; the so-called secularists are also paranoid regarding the Islamic revival in Turkey, and are haunted by it. This is why secularists try to use Ataturk to attack Muslims altogether in Turkey.

However, they forget that Ataturk's vision of Turkish society was to make it modern in technology, Turkish in identity, and Islamic in the realm of spirituality, religion and ethics. For example, Ataturk wanted Muslim women to be active in political, social, economic life, but so-called secularists were not so enthusiastic. This is the reason for the aggressive attitude of the "Kemalists" toward MerveKavakçy, who became the first member of the Turkish parliament with a headscarf in 1999. They did not allow her to take her oath of office and banged their fists on tables and shouted "Get out!" In his recent book *The Day Turkey Stood Still: MerveKavakçı's Walk into the Turkish Parliament*, Civil rights activist Richard Peres reports that BülentEcevit, leader of the Democratic Left Party and former Prime Minister, said: "Please put this woman in her place".

He then elaborated on his words by pointing out: "No one can interfere with the dress code or the headscarf or the private life of a woman; however, this is not a private abode. It is the highest institution of the state.

Those who work here have to abide by the laws and customs of the state. This is not a place to challenge the state".[20]The wives of AKP's high officials, including Gul's wife Hayrunnisa, Erdogan's wife and daughters, who wear Muslim headscarves, were also subjected to the same inhumane treatment in Turkey. The action of these secularists, who claim to be protectors of Ataturk's principles but prevent Muslim women from studying in universities, working in government institutions, or being elected as party leaders or members of parliament in headscarves, demonstrate the backwardness of so-called Turkish secularism.

Their behavior at that time was no different from those radical Muslims in Turkey who refused to send their daughters to public schools and universities in the name of Islam.

Nevertheless, modern Turkey owes a debt to Atatürk for renewal in many areas of Islam, including education and family life and the reconstruction of Islamic theology in Turkey. Therefore, Gülen has never approved of any criticism against Atatürk, including some of the interpretations of Atatürk's reforms as a war against Islam.[21] The main points that reconcile Gülen's understanding of religion with secularism can be summarized as follows:

First of all, Gülen points out that Islam as a value system should first be "established in our inner worlds, so that we are at peace with God and natural environment, and then throughout the world and then universe".[22]With regard to integration with the world, Islam preaches that Adam represents the creation of all races and the origin of human being is the same; regardless of their colour, people do not display different physical characteristics, making the idea of a common ancestor likely. Islam advocates the idea of one creation, not two (one for Gentiles, the second for the creation of Adam).

According to Gülen, "human beings, unlike other creatures who tread the path of nature have free will. We bear the gift of freedom and obligation to harmonize our life with nature.

---

[20]See Richard Peres, *The Day Turkey Stood Still: MerveKavakçı's Walk into the Turkish Parliamen*(Berkshire, Ithaca Press).

[21]FethullahGülen'in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk HakkındakiGörüşleri [FethullanGülen's Views on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk]. Available at: http://tr.fGülen.com/content/view/1916/124/).

[22]FethullahGülen, *The Messenger of God:*Muhammad (Lights: New Jersey, 2005), 209.

This harmony is also the path of our exaltation and progress, the path upon which God created human nature".[23] He suggests that harmonizing our lives depends on how much we realize our personal integrity and remember that we are social beings.[24]

Secondly, a good Muslim is one who is powerful both physically and spiritually, and also has scientific and technical competence; one whoregards whatever pleases and displeases others as a measure while interacting with others.[25]

In this meaning, Gülen promotes unity as a divine command and not segregation, and condemns any kind of racism and discrimination. He argues that unity with God and others first be "established in our inner worlds, so that we are at peace with God and natural environment, and then throughout the world and then universe".[26]

Third, reflecting on the backwardness of the Muslim world, Gülen argues that it is the result of centuries of pressure from both within and outside the Muslim community that put restrictions on feelings, thoughts, culture, and the education of Muslims; therefore they were not able to realize a renewal and development of their culture.

The backwardness of Muslim countries is due to the continuation of feudal and tribal systems and a lack of education; values like democracy, human rights, the spread of education across society, economic prosperity, equality in production, the institutionalization of consumption and income in a way that prevents class formation, the supremacy of law and justice have never been fully realized in Islamic societies.[27]

Religious bigotry established the prejudiced view of Islam, particularly among the political elites of Turkish secularists who have a lack of knowledge about Islam, Furthermore,trends in the Muslim communities can also be seen as a state-controlled secularist fear of religion.

---

[23]Ibid, pp. 201-203.
[24]Ibid, p. 202.
[25]FethullahGülen,*Pearls of Wisdom*(Lights: New Jersey, 2005), 59.
[26]Gülen, *The Messenger of God*, 209.
[27]FethullahGülen, *Towarda Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance,* (Lights: New Jersey, 2004), 240.

Gülen explains it as the secular fanaticism of blind persistence, which is against tolerance and the acceptance of differences as a result of dialogue to promote cooperation.[28] He calls for the avoidance of fundamentalism in both cases for it is not a true choice simply because Muslim cannot act out of ideological or political partisanship.[29]The Qur'an inspires dialogue and forbids killing by stating that killing a single innocent individual is like killing all of humanity (Sura*Al-Ma'ida*, 32). It comes from extremism, which is an unwillingness to accept any viewpoint but one's own. The Prophet Muhammad specifically stated, "Do not go to the extreme in your religion". Extreme ideas are not violent in themselves, but they do on occasion lead to violent acts. The Qur'an also encourages humans to live in harmony and diversity because it is a part of God's creation of the difference of languages and colours (Sura*Al-Rum*, verse 22).

A practical example of Gülen's attempt to reconcile secularism with Islam is the schools he has established in every corner of the world. As Professor Greg Barton points out:

One of the most surprising aspects of the schools is how completely secular they are. In every country in which they operate they follow local state curricula. They teach no religious subjects and there is little about them, save for an emphasis on character and moral development, which could be found in any good school, and a degree of social-conservatism reflected in dress and cross-gender socializing, to mark them as schools supported by an Islamic movement.

Within Turkey and a number of other countries it would not be possible for the schools to have any religious content in their curricula. In other countries such as Australia, however, where religious schools are an accepted element of a pluralist education system, there is nothing stopping the *hizmet*schools from following the example of Islamic schools. But in all cases the schools are committed to following a secular educational model.[30]

---

[28]Ibid, 240.

[29]FethullahGülen,"A Comparative Approach to Islam and democracy." *SAIS Review* 21(2001): 133-138.

[30] Greg Barton, "The Gülen movement in the national context: parallels with Indonesia." Paper presented at the annual meeting "*Islam in the Contemporary World: The FethullahGülen Movement in Thought and Practice,*" the Rice University, Houstan, Texas, November 8, 2005.

Thus we see that human rights can easily be violated by rigid groups of secularists and anti-secularists. What Gülen tries to do is to make a bridge between these two fractions and revive the prophetic understanding of Islam. Therefore, Gülen's presentation of Turkish Islam is a vivid picture of a "moderate Islamic/democratic" alternative to other radical Islamist movements and ultra-secularists who violate human rights.

Conclusion

Gülenwas a well-known Turkish Islamic scholar whohas inspired an Islamic resurgence in Turkey since the 1950s. His thoughts and activism arethe subject of both approval and criticism, especially around his discussions on issues of secularism and Islam. Nonetheless, he contributes to a new development of the relationship between these two ideological views: the reconciliation of secularism with Islam.

Such a contribution leads to a positive development in global peace, education, interfaith and intercultural dialogue and tolerance.

Due to his thoughts, there is a new generation of Muslims who consider Islam compatible with secular values, which in its turn, has a positive impact on the lives of Turkish Muslims by developing democracy and a pluralistic society in Turkey.