

M. Fethullah Gulen: A Preacher of Piety and Integrity of Action: A Study in Analogy Between the Gulen Movement and the Clapham Circle

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“It is not revolution and upheavals that clear roads to new and better days but someone’s soul, inspired and ablaze.” – Boris Pasternak

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the major key to understanding the Gulen Movement up to the present and into the future is to understand the historical, cultural and political impact that simple religious “preaching” has had in producing non-violent world changing movements of positive social and moral revolution. This key is often lost by modern Western analysts because of a bias against crediting this force of positive religious preaching in the light of the baneful influence of negative and unenlightened religious preaching in the history of our own culture as well as (at present) in Muslim societies. The character of the message and the messengers makes all the difference in explaining outcomes for the respective societies in the levels of oppression and violence allowed to be sustained or to flourish.

The most important moral revolutions in recent history, especially in the English speaking world (e.g., abolition of slavery, abolition of child labor, women suffrage, civil rights, etc.) centered around and cannot be understood aside from a certain kind of religious preaching that produced a distinctive kind of

religious piety and a world-changing kind of intellectual and moral conversion among the young and active social classes.

The incredible success of abolitionism in Great Britain (more than a generation before the messy and violent end of American slavery) is our case in point. John Wesley the preacher, Quakers and their preachers, and most extraordinarily, the so-called Clapham Circle centered in Clapham, England, and in the person of William Wilberforce the “lay” preacher and member of Parliament, along with his extraordinary “lay” associates, brought about the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself. Meanwhile the figures associated with the secular enlightenment temporized with the religious and non-religious warrantors and guarantors of the economic and political status quo in and by which the slave trade was justified and maintained.

Gulen is primarily a preacher and educator who has a strikingly similar impact on the religious, social and economic lives of two or three generations of very similar young people. In the language of Gulen, this kind of generational leap forward is attributable to a “Golden Generation” (Gulen, *passim* in his works and literature on the Movement). Our exploration of this comparison will show the similarities of this “ideal” generation in the thought of the British and Turkish purveyors of the “ideal.” It is axiomatic that historical analogies ought not to be carried too far. It is the burden of this paper to suggest that this analogy has hardly as yet been carried far enough.

I will gather testimony about the impact of Gulen as a preacher: how his preaching immediately affects his hearers, how it changes their understanding of the reality in which they live and act, and how it effectively changes their life direction and work. Although this is not the primary substance of this paper, its touching on this is incidentally important for two reasons:

- 1) To emphasize unambiguously that Gulen was primarily a preacher of religious and social impact, and

2) To reintroduce one idea that should be so obvious that it need not be reintroduced, i.e., that preachers (at least in the history of Muslim and Christian culture) are among the most important citizens in bringing about a good resolution to intractable moral and social evils.

The similarity of the relation (though distant historically) between Gulen and Wilberforce and the Gulen Movement and the Chapham Circle both in what is adopted and what is rejected among religious, moral, and social ideas coming from a tradition will be delineated. Gulen will be shown to be a preacher and teacher very close in character to the “Pietists” (in the British sense), and his movement will be shown to be an “enlightenment” but “orthodox” type of Muslim “Pietism” coming out of the Sufi spiritual tradition.

The distinguishing of the two movements from both fundamentalist and secularist forms of oppression and intolerance will be attempted. This can be affirmed on the basis of the empirical and historical evidence despite the fact of another almost axiomatic fact: that preachers can be among the best people in the world or among the worst, and their influence can be the best influence in culture and society or the most unfortunate. This agrees with the first axiom I learned from my major professor, i.e., “Religion can be the best thing in the world, or the worst.” No teacher of religion, including the history of Christianity or Islam can escape the truth of that axiom. In its light, it is encouraging and hopeful when such a teacher can shed understanding on times when the preachers in our differing traditions can be seen as reflecting religion as “the best thing in the world.”

This anticipates the conclusion of my paper: that a cross-cultural, cross-religious, cross-generational comparison between two religious movements, one British (18th and 19th centuries) and one Turkish (20th and 21st centuries) contains, I believe, great explanatory power for understanding the “life-changing” and “society-changing” success of the Gulen Movement.

GULEN AS PREACHER

As Faruk Tuncer puts it, “[Fetullah Gulen’s] primary profession is preaching.” (Foundations of the Intellectual Development of Fetullah Gulen) I would simply say Gulen is primarily a preacher. His character and influence would be misunderstood without this basic premise.

“Without exception, he delivers his sermons extemporaneously, and he is never observed speaking from notes.” (Unal and Williams, p 19). But theologians who hear him assert that his sermons could be used as lectures in the interpretation of the Quran in a school of Theology “without modification.” (Ibid) According to Tuncer, “Gulen demonstrates expertise in each of the primary Islamic Sciences, including Quranic interpretation (tefsir), prophetic tradition (hadis), Islamic jurisprudence (fikh), Islamic theology (Kelam) and Islamic spirituality (Tasawwuf).” (Ibid) By his own testimony, says Tuncer,

...the focus of his learning and what he knows best is the prophetic tradition. This involves in-depth knowledge of the ‘sayings, actions and reactions’ of the Prophet and accounts of events in the life of the Prophet and his companions. (Ibid)

The character of Gulen and his preaching, however, also shows a knowledge of Sufism (tasawwuf) “beyond that of many Sufi masters.” (Ibid) His knowledge of both Western and Eastern sources is vast, but his knowledge and respect for Maulana Jalaludeen Rumi and several other classical Persian poets is immense. “The wealth of classical Persian poetry is obviously a vital part of Gulen’s sermons and writings as exemplified especially in his own *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*.” (See comments by Unal, 2002)

My attempt to learn more about Gulen as a preacher encouraged many students of Gulen and activists in the movement to bring me personal testimonies of their own (too numerous to mention in this paper). However, some examples of personal reactions include testimonies of Gulen being comfortable with extemporary preaching, of one who obviously speaks from the heart, passion-

ately and often with tears, and of one who speaks from deep humility and a spirituality that reflects his own spirituality and life of worship.

Besides speaking so obviously from the heart, he also speaks through his heart with a vast knowledge of the Quran, the sayings and actions of the Prophet and his companions, and out of a deep place within the spiritual tradition. His language is beautiful and fully correct Istanbul Turkish. Furthermore, besides traditional knowledge, he references his sermons from a wealth of knowledge of both Western and Eastern thought, as well as knowledge of the contemporary world and its various manifestations. He leaves young people crying with joy, according to several eyewitnesses, and he very commonly leaves some cynical, well-educated, sophisticated secular listeners radically transformed.

Perhaps a sequel to this paper will follow up in a more scholarly way with this aspect of Gulen as a preacher. This will require, however, that the writer study in association with more Turkish-speaking eye witnesses and commentators.

For the purposes of this paper, it must be said that such testimonies are widespread about the “preachers” of the Clapham Circle with much the same emphasis and often in almost identical language. Citing only one about Pastor Venn, the preacher at the Clapham Church, it was said:

His powers of conversation were so admirable, his knowledge of religion so extensive, his acquaintance with the world so instructive, and his rigorous mind so great, that, wherever he was, and in whatever company he was placed, everyone silently hung on his lips, and enjoyed the richest feast of conversation. (Unpublished manuscript, “Character Sketch”)

Similar descriptions of Wilberforce are even more lavish and widespread in their estimation of his religious and moral speaking power. This paper is concerned, more modestly, in discerning the moral and social impact of the preaching and the analogies between the British and Turkish preachers in this regard.

TRUE “SPIRITUALLY BALANCED” ISLAM

Aslandogan has laid out well the impact, “present and potential,” of the spiritual tradition in which Gulen lives and out of which his more profound thought and work comes. (Aslandogan, *Present and Potential of the Spiritual Tradition of Islam on Contemporary Muslims: From Ghazali to Gulen*, 2007) He first deals with the somewhat confused modern (especially Western) understanding of Sufism and the tradition of spirituality out of which Gulen works. Gulen resists being confined to any particular historically manifested kind of Sufism. He wants to travel in the broad way of Islamic spirituality where the understanding and uses of Sufi traditions provide an expansive, rather than a restrictive, relation to spirituality.

“Sufism is sometimes called the esoteric dimension of Islam, as opposed to the exoteric dimension of Islamic law.” (Ibid, p.664; Cf. Nasr, S. H., p 322) Aslandogan lists three ways the influence of spirituality may be manifest to a Muslim. The first is the fellowship of a Sufi order. The second way is a way more relevant to Gulen: “in an indirect, wider influence in the larger community of Muslim thought through lectures, “sohbets” or companionship circles and other types of oral tradition.” (Ibid, p 3) The third way -- even more obvious in the development of the Gulen movement in a wider range or impact -- “upon Muslims as well as non Muslims is through printed literature and other media.” (Ibid) This is the way through which most influence on contemporary Muslims and non Muslims is felt:

The practioners of Sufism on all its different levels constitutes an important group in Islamic society even if not sociologically distinct as a class, and they have exercised great influence over the ages on fields as far apart as the inner life and public ethos psychology and art, metaphysics and the guilds, poetry and politics. (Nasr, *ibid*, 177, cited in Aslandogan 2007, *ibid*).

Aslandogan’s own summary of his arguments for an effective approach to the influencing of contemporary Muslims is the very

reasonable sounding offer of “balanced” spiritual tradition “which is the early ‘companion style’ or ‘first generation’ spiritual tradition.” (Aslandogan, *Ibid*)

He continues, “Based on a balance of the outer dimension of Islamic law and worship life and the inner dimension of spiritual disciplines, and firmly rooted in the Quranic and Prophetic tradition.” (*Ibid*) This approach obviously participates in the “more sophisticated tradition” (Aslandogan’s own characterization) of Sufism. This “balanced spiritual tradition” found substantially in the historical Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and the contemporary Gulen holds the highest potential for educating of Muslim youth with an inclusive tolerant view.” (*Ibid*, p.669)

My belief is that with very little effort, since translating is going on anyway, most of this argument could be translated into the language of 18th and early 19th century Anglican Pietism, particularly into the language of the Clapham Circle.

There are, of course, differences past which the historical analogy should not be pushed. These are primarily the theological differences about the meaning and character of Jesus’ place in revelation history. Discussion of these differences has a continuing place in interfaith dialogue, but resolutions of these issues are not vital or even a propos to the elaboration of my thesis in this paper.

But, for the spiritually balanced Muslims, God is “mirrored” in human thought in “feeling and action.”

The heart of the tradition are the concepts of *hubb*, love of the Divine and the concept of *ihsan*, or the state of constant awareness of God’s presence. One way of achieving this state is to discipline the body (action) and the heart (thoughts, feelings) toward a state of spiritual purification. (p 670)

It can easily be seen that such language is almost completely interchangeable with the British Pietist tradition simply by translating it into English. For example, God is revealed as compassionate toward His creation.

A compassionate person, therefore becomes a mirror of God the Compassionate. God helps all his creation regardless of their belief in, or rejection, of God. God's sustenance is indiscriminative. When a person helps every human in need, she becomes a mirror of God the Helper. God forgives the sins of humans who sincerely repent and turn toward Him. When a person forgives the mistakes and mistreatments of others, he becomes the mirror of God the Merciful. A target state in the spiritual tradition is to become a person such that when people see him or her they remember God. They can not help but say that "there must be a Compassionate God that such a person walks this earth." (ibid, 671)

Yet again, as to the third way the influence of spirituality may be manifest to a Muslim, Aslandogan importantly notes, it is for Gulen, "voluntary."

Therefore, every human, regardless of their creed is a mirror of God in those two aspects. This is a powerful paradigm and influence for peaceful coexistence in religious diversity. (Ibid)

The words of the famous Anatolian Sufi poet Yunus Emre, is also a source of inspiration for Gulen, that resonates in the Turkish populations even after eight centuries. (Emre, Y. K, Helminski and R. Algan, E. Helminski (trans). 1999. *The Drop That Became the Sea: Lyric Poems of Yunus Emre*. Shambhala Publications)

Human beings become mirrors of God by adhering to non-violence. According to Aslandogan,

The second influence of the spiritual tradition is the inclusive, emphatic and compassionate perspective that naturally lends itself to non-violence, going beyond tolerance to hospitality and friendship. (Aslandogan, 2007 ibid, p. 672)

The "Service Principle" is another influence from the spiritual tradition is conducive to religious plurality and world peace is the service discipline. That can be summarized in the doctrine "Serving people is serving God."(Ibid)

Connected with the principles of humility, and chivalry, this principle encourages Sufis to serve publically, regardless of their creed, in various ways, and especially in ways that are unexpected of one's social rank. Harvesting crops, cleaning toilets or helping handicapped persons with grocery shopping are some examples. Gulen comments on the concept of *futuwwa*, a composite of such virtues as generosity, munificence, modesty, chastity, trustworthiness, loyalty, mercifulness, knowledge, humility, and piety. (Ibid)

FROM HASAN AL-BASRI (642-728 OR 737) TO AL-GHAZALI (1058-1111) TO GULEN: THE SPIRITUALLY-BALANCED TRADITION

A hallmark of the balanced spiritual tradition represented by figures such as Hasan Al-Basri, Al-Ghazali, and Gulen is the balancing of the inner and outer dimensions of faith, that is the Islamic law concerning worship and community life and the principles and practices of the spiritual path. In the eyes of these scholar/masters, faith is incomplete before a person realizes a deeper experience of the faith above and beyond simple following of the rules. Ibid, p.674)

Perhaps the most famous representative of the balanced spiritual tradition of Islam is Al-Ghazali. His book entitled "The Revival of Religious Sciences" is considered as a monumental work which "aligned Sufi experiences with Islamic beliefs and practices". He is well read around the world in Muslim communities despite their differences in many aspects.

The concepts of repentance and conversion, vital components of British Pietism, are also prominent in the spiritual antecedents of Gulen, particularly in Al-Basri and Al-Ghazali.

P. J. Stewart is cited to the effect that "the future of Islam must lie in a renovated mystical orientation where debt of religious feeling can be yoked to metaphorical understanding of the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition." (Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, cited by Aslandogan, p, 679, from Marise Ruthven, 1984, *Islam in the World*, London: Granta Publications, 2006)

Surveying the Gulen literature thus far generated provides several leads pointing to the Christian movements that might provide an anal-

ogy to the Gulen Movement. For example: “individualist, pro-business currents have become prominent within Turkish Islam,” producing a quiet Islamic Reformation” by a group of “Islamic Calvinists.”

(“European Stability Initiative, Islamic Calvinists: Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia,” September 19, 2005; <http://www.esiwebb.org/pds/csi-document-id-69.pdf>, cited by Kustafa Akyol, “What Made the Gulen Movement Possible” *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gulen Movement*, p 30)

Gulen himself does not endorse the term. (Ibid, fn. 2) I would call this a proper judgment. The term, like “Turkish Puritanism,” (Ibid) it seems to me, is an attempt to provide an analogy that falls short in its historical and religious analysis of possible analogues.

Other speculation may be pointed to for fruitful analogies such as that of Elizabeth Ozdalga to the effect that the Gulen Movement’s “universalistic ethos and its emphasis on ‘activism through good deeds’ is leading to a kind of secularism of the earlier Protestantism that the Gulen movement can be said to resemble.” (Ozdalga, Elizabeth, pp 61-67) The ultimate result of secularizing trends in British Pietist movement is commented on in this paper (pp 21-22). Some have even suggested an analogy of Nursi with C. S. Lewis, a modern Anglican religious writer. (Akyol, p 28)

Just remember that fact that Christianity surpassed its dark ages thanks to godly – not secular renovators. Islamic civilization needs to follow a similar route to accomplish its renewal and the Turkish experience, and in particular the Gulen movement, hints that there are reasons for hope. (Ibid p 31)

WILBERFORCE AND THE CLAPHAM CIRCLE

“Blurbled” on the cover of one of his books as “the brightest light among British historians,” this description of Niall Ferguson is probably controversial. His book did, however, encourage me to rigorously pursue an idea that hovered over me from the beginning as I listened, read about, and experienced the people and the interpreters of the Gulen Movement in its various manifestations. That

hovering idea was that I had heard and read about something very much like this before and that it involves names, events and movements very familiar to me and very important to my interpretation as a preacher and teacher in the history of Christian thought. The specific persons and references jostling within the orbit of that idea include the enlightened Puritans (e. g., Milton, Locke, etc.), the Quakers, John Wesley and the Methodists, the Pietist Anglicans (Granville Sharpe, Zachary MacCauley), inspired preachers (John Newton, Henry and John Venn), and equally inspired business people, and members of Parliament, William Thornton, and above all in commitment and oratory gifts, William Wilberforce.

In my interest in finding a model to help European and American scholars make sense of the character and impact of the Gulen Movement, I began to research historical analyses of the impact of a group of British preachers, elites, business men and impassioned male and female social and moral reformers known in histories as the “Clapham Circle.”

My delight was in Ferguson’s unabashed attribution of primary credit for perhaps the greatest moral triumph of modern history to a group of men and women of genuine moral power and deeply experienced religious impulse. As a historian of economic and British imperialism, he certainly could have saved more room for causal explanations involving economic self-interest on the rise of capitalism (about which he also is an expert historian.)

In fact he begins his discussion of the remarkable British accomplishment of abolishing the slave trade, and slavery, itself with a paean to Zachary Macauley. He was the son of a clergyman and father of the greatest Victorian historian, Thomas Babington Macauley. He had felt “wicked” as a young man working as the manager of a sugar plantation in Jamaica where he “... quickly found himself unable to reconcile his work with his Christian faith.” (Ferguson, p 95)

After returning to England, member of Parliament Henry Thornton sent him to Sierra Leone where he later became governor. After several years of work and investigation of the “mechan-

ics” of the slave trade, he returned to England “not just an expert on the slave trade; he was the expert.” (Ibid, p 96)

Some of the significant observations by Ferguson that are especially relevant to our study in the comparison of the Gulen Movement and the Clapham movement are as follows:

There was only one place in London for a man like Macauley to live, and that was Clapham. There he would be sure of finding likeminded souls. Indeed, it might be said that the moral transformation of the British Empire began in Holy Trinity church, on the northside of Clapham Common. Macauley’s fellow parishioners, who included Thornton and the dazzling Parliamentary orator William Wilberforce, combined evangelical fervor with hard-nosed nous [brain power].

The men and women of the Clapham Circle “excelled at mobilizing a new generation of grassroots activists. Armed with Macauley’s first hand accounts of the slave trade, they resolved to secure its abolition.” (Ibid)

The parallels between this generation of British Pietists, elites, entrepreneurs, preachers, and reformers of manners (morals) and the “Servant” movement (*hizmet*) of Gulen’s “generation of hope” are not merely superficial. In fact, this type of comparison might reasonably be assumed by default to be superficial, especially considering the historical, cultural, and religious distance between the two movements. The analogues actually appear more substantial, however, when conclusions of the voluminous recent analyses of the Gulen Movement are brought to bear on the subject. The key, I would argue, is the fact that the natures of the religious and moral impulses of the two movements are the least distant of all the variables. Again, quoting Ferguson:

It is not easy to explain so profound a change in the ethics of a people. It used to be argued that slavery was abolished simply because it had ceased to be profitable, but all the evidence points the other way; in fact, it was abolished despite the fact that it was still profitable [emphasis mine]. (Ibid)

“What we need to understand, then,” Ferguson concludes, “is a collective change of heart.” (Ibid)

With the Clapham circle, Ferguson feels strongly bound to recognize that the most effective causal impulse is one that is profoundly religious (spiritual) and moral which does not completely displace other causal factors, but in one shining moment of Western Christian history weighted the whole culture of British church, business, politics and philanthropy to the point that it became an unexpected *sine qua non* for sustaining a peaceful “revolution” of humaneness and compassion unprecedented and subsequently unequalled in English or Western society. There have been other “circles” in modern history that have changed the world. One thinks of the “circles” of American and French revolutionaries and later, of Marx-Leninism, but none that has redeemed the reputation of, and justified the existence of, “Christian” preaching and teaching in such a way as to answer, at least partially, the questions modern secular people are right to ask: i.e., “What in the world is ‘Christianity’ good for?” and “Why has the dominant religion of Western Culture appeared so often to its critics (and its own prophetic voices) to end up so firmly ensconced on the ‘wrong side’ of the great moral issues of its own history?”

Though in many ways deemed to be *sui generis* in its peculiarly effective impact, it certainly was not without the context of the morally powerful work of the preceding generation of preachers and intended reformers. Any good historian of Christianity can summarize the background to the antislavery movement that succeeded in changing the world. I choose Owen Chadwick’s brief summary:

The leaders of the campaign against slavery were of five kinds: the intellectuals of the Enlightenment; the more humane of the American and French revolutionaries; Catholic missionaries in the Americas (the Jesuits never allowed slaves in their settlements); some radical Christians, such as the Quakers (William Penn would not allow slaves in ‘his’ colony of Pennsylvania), and devout English evangelicals led by the parliamentarian William Wilberforce. This last was of importance because

Britain had much to lose, in money and property, through ending slavery. It abolished the slave trade in 1807, and used its warships to enforce those laws; this had a great effect on other nations. But Britain did not finally abolish slavery itself until 1833. (Chadwick, p 242)

As to the place economics had in the ultimate political victory, Chadwick puts his view more succinctly: “This was an influence of the churches on a moral stain which could be abolished only at the cost of many people’s prosperity.” (Ibid)

Of all the leaders of antislavery rhetoric in both England and America, the adherents to the so-called Enlightenment (even the “Enlightenment” figures who might reasonably be called the “Christian Enlightenment”), e.g. Locke, Jefferson, etc., were almost to the person too ambivalent because of political, economic, class and social considerations to contribute effectively to the work that would ultimately result in the abolition of the slave trade and slavery itself. That work was left to the preachers and their students.

Without trying to substantiate such an assessment in each and every example, I will simply supply testimony for a few. There were American participants in the intense moral resoluteness of the Clapham Circle who were in continuous correspondence with each other, as documented by Roger Burns (in **Am I Not a Man and a Brother?** New York: Chelsea House 1977), particularly the Quakers like Anthony Benezet who corresponded with John Wesley and Granville Sharp. (Ibid, *passim* But the Enlightenment representative among the American Revolutionaries did not so connect with Clapham. (Burns, *ibid*, *passim*)

Burns himself comments on the relation of Thomas Jefferson to the antislavery crusade which was also typical of the Enlightenment figures in Britain. Despite his work on the Declaration of Independence, says Burns, Thomas Jefferson’s

...ambivalence on the subject of slavery was awesome—he was a philosopher who extolled the natural right to life and liberty and at the same time held over 250 slaves when he died; a man

who many times advocated the end of the slave trade but, nevertheless, dispatched slave catchers to the North to track down runaways; a man who, as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, seconded a motion in support of a manumission law that was later defeated and several years later held onto most of his black property when such a law was actually adopted; a man who on many occasions expressed his moral repugnance of a system mired in “unremitting despotism” and “daily...tyranny” and at the same time ordered the flogging of some of the captured black escapees from the Monticello labor force. Tempered by political expedience, class allegiance, and racist ideology, Jefferson’s oft-expressed libertarian antislavery beliefs remained throughout his life primarily philosophical, not grounded on any real expectation that abolition schemes would be successful or even desirable.

In the spring of 1776, however, Jefferson attempted to include a philippic against slavery in one of the most significant documents in American history—the Declaration of Independence.... The philippic was, of course, excised by the Congress in deference to South Carolina and Georgia and to the interests of northern slave dealers....the philosophical beliefs that prompted the Virginia savant to compose the antislavery tirade did not act to restrain him two years later when, as chairman of a committee to revise and codify the Virginia statutes, he reported a bill that strengthened the state slave code. (Bruns, *ibid*, 391)

As a result the American Congress was left in the historical dust by the British Parliament which eventually succumbed to the petitions and speeches and painful work of William Wilberforce and his preachers over decades, with help only from a very lately converted “Enlightenment” class, despite the fact that there had long been Quakers, Methodists, and Enlightenment people like Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, who rhetorically battled against slavery, but attempt after attempt was thwarted alternatively by the Commons and the House of Lords. But then according to Ferguson, came the triumph of a “collective change of heart.”

The campaign for abolition was one of the first great extra-Parliamentary agitations. Its leadership was remarkably broad. The

founders of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson, were Anglicans, but most of their close associates were Quakers. Support for the cause extended beyond Clapham to embrace the Younger Pitt, the ex-slaver John Newton, Edmund Burke, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the king of the Potteries, Josiah Wedgwood, himself a Unitarian. Men from all these different dominations made common cause against slavery in meetings like the one attended by the young David Livingstone at Exeter Hall.

The most impressive thing about the campaign was the extent of the support that it mobilized. Wedgwood produced thousands of anti-slavery badges, depicting a black figure on a white background and bearing the motto ‘Am I not a man and a brother?’ They were soon ubiquitous. When 11,000 people in Manchester alone—two-thirds of the male population—signed a petition calling for an end to the trade, it amounted to a call for an ethical foreign policy, a call so widespread that the government did not dare ignore it. In 1807 the slave trade was abolished. From now on convicted slavers faced, by a nice irony, transportation to Britain’s penal colony in Australia. Nor were the reformers satisfied with that victory. In 1814 no fewer than 750,000 names were put to petitions calling for the abolition of slavery itself.

Thanks to the work of zealous activists armed only with pens, paper and moral indignation, Britain had turned against slavery. Even more remarkably, the slave trade had been abolished in the face of determined opposition from some powerful vested interests. (Ferguson, *Ibid*, pp. 96-97)

The great preachers in England whose renewal of spirituality in England come very near to analogy with Sufi inclined preachers like Al-Ghazali, Rumi Bediuzzaman, Said Nursi were the “Quakers” (Friends), “Methodists,” particularly John Wesley, himself (1703-91), and the Anglican “Pietists” such as John Newton (1725-1807), the theologian poet William Cowper (1731-1800), and the Clapham preachers Henry (1796-1873) and John Venn.

‘The gospel of Christ’, said John [Wesley],

‘knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness.’ In his organization, the laity were in control, and there was scope for everyone’s talents, including women, who could lead worship and preach. But the movement was not built on startling conversions, as its preachers sometimes implied. It imitated the methods and drew on the personnel of the multitude of religious societies for meditation and mutual edification which were proliferating in England, not least within the established church, from the end of the seventeenth century, and it appealed to the hard-working and respectable families of tradesmen and artisans who wanted to find in their religion a deeper sense of ‘belonging’. Even so, Wesley’s preachers struck out into the spiritual wastelands where industrial development and mining were creating a new class estranged from religious observances, and among them the ‘chapel’ became a unique civilizing influence. McManner, *ibid*, p. 293)

But who would create through education and inspiration a generation of hope and service to England’s poor and oppressed and liberation of the enslaved in the Western world, and maybe even beyond? In other words,

[W]ho would convert high society? Not Wesley’s movement; William Wilberforce, a rich young Member of Parliament, was to thank God he had not become ‘a bigoted despised Methodist’. When, in 1785, he was converted from ‘mere nominal Christianity’, he was convinced of his vocation to the great: ‘there was needed some reformer of the nation’s morals and who should raise his voice in the high places of the land’. One of the dilemmas Christians have always faced is the question of giving special consideration to converting the influential—the method of the Jesuits, changing the world by acting as confessors and educators to the ruling class. Purists who regret Wilberforce’s concentration on the elite may reflect that their reservations were shared at the time by ship and plantation owners who feared legislative action against the slave-trade. (McManners, *Ibid*)

WILBERFORCE THE PREACHER

Despite the fact that William Wilberforce was not a “clergyman” in the Church of England, he still was one of her greatest “preachers”

in the sense that we mean preacher in this paper. The most powerful preacher of the first Christian century describes himself as a “mud pot.”

It is the God who said “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. But we have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. (Paul of Tarsus, II Corinthians 4: 6-7).

It so happens that like Paul, William had physical deficiencies. He was physically small (called the “shrimp,” he was 5” 4”) and suffered numerous physical and emotionally caused ailments all his life. He was also evidently addicted to his doctor-prescribed medication during many years of his life. Unlike Paul, evidently, he was a magnificent orator before and after he became a preacher in the sense relevant to this paper. The difference in the way he used his oratorical gift was dependent entirely on the effect of his spiritual “conversion” experience on his thinking and his life commitment. After a life dedicated to enjoying the luxuries and benefits of his station in British society, his orientation toward life was completely changed under the “pictist” counsel of teacher Isaac Milner and preacher/ clergyman/ poet/former slave trader/ and former slave owner John Newton. Wilberforce considered resigning his seat in Parliament to become a clergyman, but Newton convinced him to stay in Parliament and to lead the fight in that body for the abolition of the slave trade.

Wilberforce came to agree, and set his goal as a “lay” preacher and influential citizen of British society and Member of Parliament to work for the reformation of Parliament, political emancipation of Roman Catholics, “reformation of manners (morals)” and the abolition to the slave trade and of slavery itself. In order to accomplish his goals he brilliantly led as the central “servant” in the above described Clapham Circle. Out of this Circle, and principally out of his own house, he developed one of the most singularly successful

religious movements for cultural, societal and political reform in history. (Pollock, *passim*)

Historian John McManners is exuberant in his description of what came out of this movement in addition to Wilberforce's originally stated general goals:

The list of societies—something like a hundred—to which Wilberforce subscribed indicates the scope of the movement: the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (running now for a century), the Church Missionary Society, the new British and Foreign Bible Society, societies for suppressing vice, for prosecuting blasphemy, for promoting the welfare of soldiers and sailors, setting up orphanages, lying-in homes for poor women, and refuges for vagrants, and others more specific in nature to aid 'climbing boys', French refugees, Irish serving girls, debtors, and 'criminal poor children'—and still more specifically, 'the City of London Truss Society for the Relief of the Ruptured Poor'. In our time and in our favoured fifth of the globe, it is difficult to do justice to this paternalistic and piecemeal generosity. We can be critical of its shortcomings, for the gospel ideal of charity has now been taken over by the secularized society; the welfare state performs the duties to the poor and disinherited which once made Christianity appear indispensable. In so far as Christianity permeates society, it ensures its own 'decline' in terms of statistical allegiance and obvious practical relevance. In religion, nothing fails like success. (McManners, pp 207- 209)

Wilberforce's most influential work as an educator and a "preacher" was his great book (one of the more influential in British history) entitled *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians of the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*, by William Wilberforce. As is the case with most books of this period, the title virtually says it all. But that's not quite all. Here is the heart of his sermon to the British people: "The bulk of nominal Christians are" he declares, "defective in the love of God" and "in the strength of their love toward their fellow-creatures." (p 319 *et sequitur*). He continues,

But the grand radical defect in the practical system of these nominal Christians is their forgetfulness of all the peculiar doctrines of the religion which they profess....

Here, then, we come again to the grand distinction between the religion of Christ and that of the bulk of nominal Christians in the present day. The point is of the utmost practical importance, and we would there trace it into its actual effects. (p 326)

...But still, the progress of irreligion, and the decay of morals at home are such as to alarm every considerate mind, and to forebode the worst of consequences, unless some remedy can be applied to the growing evil. We can depend only upon true Christians for effecting, in any degree, the important service....Uniformity of conduct, and perseverance in exertion, will be requisite; but among no others can we look for those qualities. (p 446)

Let [true Christians] be active, useful, generous towards others; manifestly moderate and self-denying in themselves. Let them be ashamed of idleness, as they would be of the most acknowledged sin. When Providence blesses them with affluence, let them withdraw from the competition of vanity; and, without sordidness or absurdity, show by their modest demeanour, and by their retiring from display, that, without affecting singularity, they are not slaves to fashion; that they consider it as their duty to set an example of moderation and sobriety, and to reserve for nobler and more disinterested purposes, the money which others selfishly waste in parade, and dress, and equipage. Let them evince, in short, a manifest moderation in all temporal things; as becomes those whose affections are set on higher objects than any which this world affords, and those who possess within their own bosoms a fund of satisfaction and comfort, which the world seeks in vanity and dissipation. (p 447)

Let them cultivate a catholic spirit of universal good-will, and of amicable fellowship towards all those, of whatever sect or denomination, who, differing from them in non-essentials, agree with them in the grand fundamentals of religion. Let them countenance men of real piety wherever they are found; and encourage in others every attempt to repress the progress of vice, and to revive and diffuse the influence of religion and virtue. (Ibid)

The most enthusiastic and perhaps historically illuminating commentary on the book is a contemporary one, one which coincidentally provides material for illustrating the analogue between Gulen the Preacher and Wilberforce the Preacher, and the Gulen “Servant” movement and the Clapham Circle “Servant” movement. This is commentary by Daniel Wilson, D. D., Lord Bishop (Anglican) of Calcutta, in his “Introductory Essay” written in 1824. William Wilburforce, Wilson declares, recommends “a generous relationship in doing good...” (p 1)

Through Wilberforce’s promotion of serious education “a source of religious principle is thus early opened in the youthful mind, talent is developed in unison with this knowledge and habits essential to its safe direction and the national characters is rising.” (Ibid)

“We firmly believe such a period of light and exertions has not appeared, taking it altogether, since the days of the apostles. We can conceive of nothing more pregnant with future blessings.” (Ibid)

For the “pietists” the restoration of the light and exertion characteristic of the days of the apostles” corresponds to Gulen’s comparison of the Golden Generation and the light and exertion characteristic of the days of the companions of the Prophet.

While the term Golden Generation evokes the *hadith* that the early generations of Muslims were the best and a model for those who came later, in Gulen’s thought the admiration of tradition persists along with an evocation of “hope” that a “new generation” may restore and recover what has been lost,...(Maigre, p. 71)

Wilson continues with an exuberant description of the “Servant” generation, the generation of hope raised up by the life and work of Wilberforce and his “Circle”:

Who formed the noble individuals that have taken the lead in the present day? How few in numbers comparatively; and yet suppose them withdrawn, and everything would be at a stand! Authors, compilers, translators, travelers, agents, artists, schoolmasters, catechists [religion tutors], missionaries [those sent

overseas], secretaries, presidents, public speakers,—we are appealing to those who know the interior of our great societies—have been raised up in a remarkable manner to fill these respective posts, and have displayed the appropriate talents which those posts required....(Wilson, Ibid)

GOD’S SOCIAL CAPITAL: HIZMET-THE SERVANT MOVEMENT

There is a great deal said among Gulen scholars about religion as a source of social capital. (Etga Igar, p) Being “social capital” was certainly not the primary essence of religion from the “Pietist” perspective, but, in their social movement, “religion” or spirituality turned out to be the most effective source of the “social capital” in the success of their movement. Social capital turned out to be spiritual capital, and so it is in the Gulen Movement:

When and under what conditions does religion become a source of cooperation rather than conflict in civil society? The Gulen movement is an Islamic social movement that bases its philosophy on increasing religious consciousness at the individual level and making Islam an important social force in the public sphere. (p 132; See also Krause, pp 163-176)

Aside from the obvious commonalities deriving from both being historical movements within Abrahamic faiths who believe in the Oneness, the Love, and the Compassion of God and in the oneness of the human race called to surrender to and worship only Him, the movements we are studying are strikingly similar in much more particular ways.

The Clapham Circle movement transcended the sectarian divisions of the time, including within its fellowship of activists Quakers, Methodists, Anglicans, and even Unitarians – an exceedingly wide spectrum of British and American Christians. It included within its ranks both Calvinists and Armenian theologians, certainly the most acrimonious Sect theological battle of the times. In the Clapham Circle, all were dedicated to plumbing the depths of what was called the heart of religion – the love and compassion of

God and the love and compassion mirrored in human beings to one another. (See Hennell, Michael M., p 261ff)

Gulen's expansive transcending of the various sectarian obstacles in the history of his own spiritual tradition and the unfolding of what he considered its good aspects mirrors that of the Clapham Circle and their movement. Both movements agree strongly in the view that the world and its inhabitants are the creation of God and that, therefore, life in the world should be lived out of profound spiritual impulse. Both agree that a great deal of institutional religion (the "bulk" as Wilberforce would put it) are insufficiently knowledgeable of "True" or "Real" religion, and neither Wilberforce nor Gulen hesitate to point this out in the context of their particular "Christian" or "Islamic" societies – whichever the case may be. ("In true Islam terror does not exist." In Capan, Ergun, pp 1-8).

In both cases, the principal impulse is religious (or spiritual), and they both, therefore, assume that a purely secular or "untrue" religious impulse does not contain the truth or the moral power to be adequate to the task of accomplishing God's will in the life of the individual or the life of the community (*Umma*/Church) or in human society.

Both seem to agree that some experiences of repentance and conversion under the power of God and His revelation should be expected of human beings, and that this would result in humility, sorrow for sin (oppression, injustice) and the kindling of compassion and compassionate action. (Harith al Muhasiki or Rasrah states "The first stage is repentance or conversion: then comes a series of others, e.g., renunciation, poverty, patience, and trust in God." (Cited by Aslandogan, p. 676, from Nicholson, R. A, 1931, *Mysticism in the Legacy of Islam*, ed. by Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume, London, pp. 211-212)

For the Clapham Circle, the sins at specific issue for their time were spiritual and societal unbelief and corruption manifested in "coarseness" of manners (morals), gross religious sectarianism, materialism, horrific oppression (in particular the slave trade and slavery), and the lack of compassion on the part of the elite and

ruling classes for the plight of the poor and helpless, and the needy of all kinds.

For the Gulen Movement, none of these concerns would be left out. But of specific concerns still facing us in our time, sectarianism and the threat of intercivilizational violence are the most threatening and call for a strategy of serious and urgent interfaith dialogue and understanding. The plan being followed by the Gulen movement to address these issues is amazingly similar to the Clapham Circle “scheme” (as the British would say). It includes preaching for repentance and conversion and organizing in such a way that the really effective preacher would be the *bizmet* (the community of service) made up of “the generation of hope.” P. T. Forsyth, the great British preacher of the latter part of the 19th century, said that the “One Great Preacher” is the (church) community. (Forsyth, pp 411-416) Gulen also thinks along these lines.

In the same way that the Gulen Movement as a movement steers away from political parties, the Clapham group steered away from French radicalism and did not yield to the Whig insistence on ignoring the slave trade question (even though they were themselves Whigs (Conservatives) and not radical politically. This preserves both Gulen and Wiberforce and their movements from the undue influence of political self-interest.

CONCLUSION: A MODEL OF HISTORICAL SUCCESS AS AN INTERPRETIVE MODEL FOR PRESENT SUCCESSES

The broad moral educational approach characteristic of both the Gulen “Servant” movements and the Clapham Circle contain basically the same general elements whether in dealing with the problems of terrorism or the problems of slavery. That is:

- 1) Proclaiming a strong humanitarian condemnation of Terrorism/Slavery on moral grounds,
- 2) Showing the incompatibility of Terrorism/Slavery with the most profound principles of the religious tradition,

3) Showing how religious texts have been abused and “pointing to the fact that individuals, special interests and special economic trades” are profiting from the continuation of these horrific activities for economic or political power, and

4) Providing practical service and education that promotes mutual understanding, respect, opportunity, and hope.

In the case of the institutions encouraged by Gulen, they would “foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and respect” giving hope for upward mobility. (Saritoprak, pp 413-427; Cited by Aslandogan and Cinar, p 332). Nonviolence, peace, and justice hopefully, would be the social and political dividends.

And, if Wilberforce had not believed deep in his soul that a great deal of prevailing “cultural Christianity could be clearly contrasted with what he called ‘Real Christianity,’” we would never have heard much about him. The same may be said about Martin Luther King in 1960’s America, or Nelson Mandela in “Christian” (Dutch Reformed) South Africa. If Fethulah Gulen and his teachers had not had the moral audacity to speak of a “True Islam” as opposed to an Islam which was merely cultural or fundamentalistic reactionism, we would never have heard of him and would not be gathered together in this conference.

This approach is ripe for sharing with the world and is consistent with the world view and shared values of Christians and Muslims, and even more particularly with the movements we have been describing. As one Wilberforce scholar succinctly describes this approach, it is providing vision, establishing of networking and finally “making goodness fashionable.” (“The Better Hour: The Legacy of William Wilberforce”)

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