
Mission by Service: the Hizmet Movement

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Zusammenfassung

Die Hizmet-Bewegung, die von dem türkischen spirituellen Führer Fethullah Gülen (*1941) inspiriert ist, lässt sich als Instanz einer transnationalen Missionsbewegung verstehen. Der folgende Beitrag nimmt dies zur Basis einer Analyse des historischen Kontextes, in welchem die Hizmet(»Dienst«)-Bewegung sich entwickelt hat, sowie ihres theologischen und spirituellen Hintergrunds. Ausgehend von der Idee, dass der Glaube durch ethisches Verhalten erneuert werden kann, ist die Bewegung aktiv in der Erziehung, im Dialog und in karitativem Tun. Die Motivationen der in der Hizmet-Bewegung tätigen Menschen weisen einige frappierende Parallelen zu den klassischen und modernen Formen missionarischen Engagements im Christentum auf.

Schlüsselbegriffe

- Hizmet-Bewegung
- Fethullah Gülen
- Glaube und ethisches Verhalten
- vergleichende Analyse der Hizmet-Bewegung mit christlichem missionarischem Engagement

Abstract

The Hizmet Movement, inspired by the Turkish Muslim spiritual leader M. Fethullah Gülen (born 1941), can be seen as an instance of a transnational missionary movement. This article makes that argument on the basis of an analysis of the historical context in which the Hizmet (»Service«) Movement developed and of its theological and spiritual backgrounds. On the basis of the notion that faith can be renewed by ethical conduct, the movement is active in education, dialogue, and charity work. The motivations of the people who volunteer in the Hizmet Movement display some striking parallels with both classical and modern forms of missionary engagement in Christianity.

Keywords

- Hizmet Movement
- Fethullah Gülen
- faith and ethical conduct
- comparative analysis of the Hizmet Movement and Christian missionary engagement

Sumario

El movimiento Hizmet, inspirado por el guía espiritual turco Fethullah Gülen (*1941), se puede ver como la instancia de un movimiento misionero transnacional. El artículo toma esto como base para un análisis del contexto histórico, en el que se ha desarrollado el movimiento Hizmet (»Servicio«), así como de su transfondo teológico y espiritual. Partiendo de la idea de que la fe se puede renovar por el comportamiento ético, el movimiento trabaja en la educación, el diálogo y la obra caritativa. Las motivaciones de las personas comprometidas con el movimiento Hizmet se parecen de forma llamativa a las formas clásicas y modernas del trabajo misionero en el cristianismo.

Palabras clave

- movimiento Hizmet
- Fethullah Gülen
- fe y comportamiento ético
- análisis comparativo del Movimiento Hizmet con el trabajo misionero cristiano

The subject of my paper in the context of this symposium on transnational missionary movements is the Turkish *Hizmet* Movement connected with the spiritual leadership of *Hocaefendi* Fethullah Gülen.¹ Before I enter into this topic, I should address the way in which the Gülen and the Hizmet Movement have become associated with political resistance against the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party,² and more specifically with the infamous military coup of July 2016. Consequently, the public media usually describe Gülen and the *Hizmet* Movement as a political movement, and this impression is reinforced by the fact that Gülen gives political statements and interviews to newspapers such as *Le Monde*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Washington Post*.³ While I do think that this impression is misleading since it does not take into account the spiritual nature of the man and the movement inspired by him, I agree that the political turmoil in which they find themselves nowadays may be a by-product of the success of the Hizmet Movement as a transnational missionary organization.

Limiting myself now to the task of sketching the Hizmet Movement as a successful but controversial transnational missionary movement, I will proceed in six steps. First, I will give a short historical introduction to Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement; next, I will distinguish a few phases in the historical development of the movement that are important for our subject-matter. In the third place, I will show how the movement is a missionary movement by drawing attention the idea of »renewal by conduct«. In the fourth place, I will sketch three areas in which the movement is active, and finally I want to pay attention to what two colleagues have said about the type of missionary activity that the movement represents.

1 A Short Historical Context

Before we can discuss the missionary character of the *Hizmet* Movement, we need to know a bit more about its origins. As I said before, M. Fethullah Gülen is the person who can be considered its founder, even though it would be better to say that he was the person who inspired the foundation of the movement. Gülen was born in the eastern part of Turkey in 1938 or 1941.⁴ In some accounts, Gülen's date of birth was said to coincide

¹ *Hizmet* means »service« in Turkish, and it is the way those involved in this movement like to refer to themselves. Outsiders used to speak about the »Gülen Movement« which goes against the basic idea in the movement that attention should not be directed to Gülen but to the people who do the actual work. Nowadays, the government in Turkey prefers to speak about the Hizmet as a »terrorist organization«. *Hocaefendi* means »esteemed teacher«.

² Usually referenced as AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* in Turkish).

³ Gülen's opinions and articles have been published in *Le Monde*, Dec. 17, 2015 and Aug. 10, 2016; and in the *Washington Post* on May 15, 2017. An interview with Gülen by German journalist Rainer Hermann was published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on Nov. 10, 2012.

⁴ The lack of certainty about the exact date of his birth is one of the consequences of the fact that no critical biography of Gülen has been published thus far. The two most important studies in German and English are: Bekim AGAI, *Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs: Das Bildungsnetzwerk um Fethullah Gülen* (geb. 1938): Die flexible Umsetzung modernen islamischen Gedankenguts (Bonner Islamstudien 2), Schenefeld 2004, and M. Hakan YAVUZ, *Towards an Islamic*

Enlightenment: The Gülen Movement, New York 2013. Some significant discussion also in Marcia HERMANSEN, *Who is Fethullah Gülen? An Overview of His Life*, in: Martin E. MARTY (ed.), *Hizmet Means Service. Perspectives on an Alternative Path within Islam*, Oakland CA 2015, 18-40. See also chapter 3, »The Life and Works of M. Fethullah Gülen«, in: Pim VALKENBERG, *Renewing Islam By Service: A Christian View of Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement*, Washington D.C. 2015, 67-120.

with the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on November 10, 1938. Other descriptions point to the fact that in rural Eastern Turkey, registration of births was not practiced on a regular basis.⁵ Despite the fact that he was not able to enroll in any regular secondary education – he had only a local *madrassa* education – Gülen passed the examination for preacher and started to preach regularly in a number of mosques, first in Edirne (1959), and later in Izmir (1966). It was during the years in Izmir (1966–72) that the first activities of what was to become the Hizmet Movement can be dated. At that time, Izmir was a relatively secular place, and the political situation was rather unstable. After the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal, the secular Republican People's Party had absolute power until a multiparty system was introduced in 1946; the Democratic Party came to power four years later until a military coup changed the political landscape in 1960. The Republican People's Party took over again in 1961, and the Democratic Party regained power in 1965 until the military intervened again in 1971. The atmosphere in these days was characterized by uncertainty, aggressive secularism according to the French model of *laïcité*, and constant changes in economic and political fortunes. Gülen was in fact arrested by the military in 1971 and spent some time in prison together with his followers. He had been appointed to the Qur'ân school next to the Kestanepazarı Mosque to teach courses on Islamic sciences in 1966. I interviewed a number of his first supporters in Izmir, and they describe that he was a very humble and simple man, who lived and slept under very poor conditions and did not even want to accept a glass of water from his students. He went to the coffee houses in the city in order to talk with the students of the universities because he wanted to get to know their viewpoints, but he also wanted to give them a form of religious education, seeing that many of them were atheists and socialists. This form of education may be described as a form of *da'wa* (»invitation« to Islam) following the ideas of Said Nursi – a scholar who inspired much of Gülen's thinking – that all authentic monotheists should work together against atheism.⁶ The religious education took the form of what is called a *sohbet* in Turkish: a religious conversation between friends in the form of questions and answers. These *sohbetler* (plural form) still characterize the education method of Gülen; many books that he published later find their origins in such religious conversations, and in the *vaazlar* (catechetical sermons) that he delivered in the mosques before the regular Friday afternoon prayer. The friends whom I interviewed tell me that he came to the conclusion that these students needed better accommodations for their study, so they started a foundation that started to rent buildings and boarding schools for these students. This is how the Hizmet Movement started.

5 HERMANSEN (Who is Fethullah Gülen [fn. 4], 18) states, on the basis of information from Gülen's younger brother, that the name Fethullah was refused by the registrar as being too religious, and therefore Gülen's father had to come back later to register his older son together with his younger son, born on April 27, 1942. The birth date was antedated by one year, so that Fethullah's official birth day in most sources is now April 27, 1941.

6 See AGAI, *Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs* (fn. 4), 140–145.

7 See analysis in Pim VALKENBERG, *The Intellectual Format of the Hizmet Movement: A Discourse Analysis*, in: Gürkan ÇELİK / Johan LEMAN / Karel STEENBRINK (ed.), *Gülen-Inspired Hizmet in Europe: The Western Journey of a Turkish Muslim Movement*, Brussels 2015, 49–65.

8 A few examples from the Netherlands in VALKENBERG, *Renewing Islam by Service* (fn. 4), 15–25. After the experiences described there, the Hizmet in the Netherlands decided to create a new website with a greater openness to the general public: www.hizmetbeweging.nl (last accessed October 27, 2017).

9 See AGAI, *Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs* (fn. 4).

2 Phases in the Historical Development of the Movement

One of the characteristics of the Hizmet Movement is a certain ambiguity in its language. This can be exemplified in Gülen's books: some of them are specifically addressed to a Muslim public, while others are much more general and appeal to common human values and Western authors.⁷ In the behavior of supporters of the Hizmet Movement, one may observe a similar ambiguity: while presenting themselves as secular in public, they are often very pious in their private life. I have witnessed this ambiguity myself quite a few times in the Netherlands when supporters of the Hizmet publicly deny any involvement in the organization or even deny that they have knowledge of Hocaefendi. It is clear that such lack of transparency can be explained by the tense political situation in Turkey – while the tension was historically with the secular government, it has returned now vis-à-vis the Erdoğan administration – but it is also clear that it does not work well in the »open society« of Western Europe and therefore leads to suspicions of a hidden agenda.⁸ Joshua Hendrick even thinks that this creation of ambiguity is an organizational strategy, but I will come back to his analysis later. For now I want to focus on four levels in the discourse of the Hizmet Movement, using Bekim Agai's analysis of the network in what he calls the Gülen Movement.⁹ He distinguishes four levels of involvement in the Movement that can be represented by four concentric circles.¹⁰ In the inner circle we find the immediate students of Fethullah Gülen and those who totally identify with this group. In Turkish they are usually called the *abiler* (shorthand form of *ağabeyler*, »older brothers«) and they usually live together in the dormitories or »light houses« (*ışık evleri*) founded by the movement. They come together for *sohbetler* and read the works of Gülen together. They form the *cemaat* (»community«): a network of close supporters and first students who speak a common language with specific references (such as »golden generation«; »fifth floor«) that function as an inside language.¹¹ They share their spirituality and their faith with Fethullah Gülen and model their lives after him, insofar as that is possible. The second level is that of the ordinary members of the movement who are inspired by Gülen and who may be addressed in religious language, but who do not share in all the specifics of the inner circle. They read magazines popular in the Movement and visit Gülen-inspired schools but they are typically guided by the *abiler*. The third level of the network consists of Turkish citizens who may not have a specific religious background but bring their children to the educational institutions simply because they are the best schools. They like the Turkish cultural aspect of the Hizmet but do not necessarily share its religious background. I must add between brackets that this might be the part of Agai's analysis that has suffered most from the political developments: no one in Turkey would nowadays publicly speak of Gülen as a Turkish national hero. And no one can

¹⁰ Another version of these concentric circles as »graduated affiliation« in: Joshua D. HENDRICK, *Gülen: The Ambiguous Politics of Market Islam in Turkey and the World*, New York/London 2013, 122.

¹¹ See HERMANSEN, *Who is Fethullah Gülen?* (fn. 4), 30.

send his or her children to the schools because they have all been forced to close, which is not only sad for the persons involved but also bad for the general level of education in Turkey. The fourth and final level consists of people who are associated with the network worldwide because they like good education, intercultural dialogue and network building, but they might have no idea of the specific background of the institutions, specifically if these institutions bear very neutral names. In the United States, for instance, we can find the Niagara Foundation, Turkish Cultural Center, Respect Graduate School, or Magnolia Science Academy or Pioneer Charter School of Science. These are all organizations inspired by Fethullah Gülen, but in most cases it is hard to find any public evidence of that.¹² The people associated with the network at this level might be Muslims but not necessarily: many of the dialogue institutions have regular collaborators and guests who have a different faith background.

Even though it is a bit speculative, it is possible to connect these levels of participation in the Hizmet network, and the levels of language that are characteristic of these levels of participation, with historical developments in the movement. In the first phase, the movement was a local movement in Izmir, and it was not a very public movement despite the popularity of Gülen as preacher. In the 1980s – second phase – Gülen's fame spread around the country and he was asked to preach in some of the most famous mosques. The political situation became less tense and politicians such as Turgut Özal supported an economic and cultural liberal tradition. Gülen adapted these liberal values, and the movements started to get a more public presence in a growing number of schools, but also in newspapers, journals, and later radio and TV broadcasting. In the 1990s, the third phase, the Movement started two new types of initiatives. In Turkey itself, the Movement began to promote dialogue as a way to bridge religious, cultural and political differences. Notions such as »dialogue« and »tolerance« were already present in Gülen's works for some time, but now they were put into practice. The movement established national organizations in order to do so, for instance the Journalists and Writers Foundation in 1994, and the Abant Platform in 1998, bringing together journalists, scholars and politicians of different walks of life. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue organizations began their existence in this decade as well. Gülen started to adapt his language by highlighting the bridgebuilding function of the Hizmet Movement: Islamic values were still important but now they became a private motivation, while in public more general cultural values became prominent. The titles of some of Gülen's books show this, for instance »Love and the Essence of Being Human« and »Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance«.¹³ The second change in this third phase that coincides with the 1990s is the spread of the initiatives of the Movement to a number of new republics that were formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. These republics have a special place because their inhabitants are ethnically related to the Turks, and some of them have a sizeable Muslim population. However, in the fourth phase after 1997 the movement began to spread more rapidly to

12 One can find lists of »Gülen-inspired schools«, often administrated by opponents of these schools who accuse them of illicit activities. See, for instance, <http://turkishinvitations.weebly.com/list-of-us-schools.html> (accessed Sept. 15, 2017).

13 These books were published in 2004, but they consist of various speeches and columns in periodicals written in the decade before their publication in book form.

14 On these two contradictory perceptions, see Dogan KOÇ, *Strategic Defamation of Fethullah Gülen: English vs. Turkish*, Lanham 2012.

15 YAVUZ, *The Gülen Movement* (fn. 4), 45.

16 Bekim AGAI, *Die Arbeit der Gülen-Bewegung in Deutschland: Akteure, Rahmenbedingungen, Motivation und Diskurse*, in: Walter HOMOLKA (ed.), *Muslime zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Die Gülen-Bewegung als Brücke zwischen den Kulturen*, Freiburg i.Br. 2010, 9–55. For a survey of the situation in Germany,

include Europe, the United States, Australia and even Asia and Africa. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is the military »soft coup« of 1997 that brought the secularist forces in the military to political power, even though they refrained from a »hard coup«. At the same time, Gülen became more and more a contested public personality, seen by some as an Islamist-in-disguise, but by others as a secularist, or an ally of the Christians – he visited Pope John Paul II in 1998 – or even an agent of the CIA.¹⁴ Manipulated versions of some of his sermons were spread on the internet in which Gülen seemed to incite his followers to secretly infiltrate Turkish institutions. In 1999, Gülen decided to go to the United States, and he has remained there ever since, even though the Turkish government now wants his extradition. The official reason that the Hizmet gives for the exile of their spiritual leader is concern for his health, and indeed Hocaefendi has a weak health. Yet, at the same time, it is probable that Gülen did not want to become the focus of a new juridical fight. More important for our theme today, though, is another reason that Gülen gives in a private conversation with Hakan Yavuz (a scholar of the movement now based in Utah). He told him that he had often visited the Hizmet in Europe and the United States, and that he has come to the conclusion that Islam might flourish better in conditions of freedom and democracy than under autocratic Islamic regimes.¹⁵ This basically explains why followers of the Hizmet Movement started to come to Europe, the United States and Australia. Some recent research into the first supporters of the Hizmet in Europe shows that Gülen visited Turkish Muslims in Germany in 1977, and returned a few times in the 1990s.¹⁶ His message was that the Turkish Muslims should integrate into German society and strive for the best education.¹⁷ More specifically, they should stop trying to build mosques, and start to build schools.¹⁸ This is exactly what happened since the first members of the Hizmet who became publicly visible in West-European countries after 1995 were highly educated young men and women. The first European Hizmet institutions were formed between 1995 and 2000, and the same can be said for the United States. Most of the earliest institutions were schools and boarding houses, but a few years later dialogue institutions became important as well. The presence of the Hizmet in Asia and Africa developed after 2000 and is related to the development of a third field in which the movement became active, charity work.

3 The Model: Renewal By Conduct

The best way to understand the specific characteristics of the Hizmet Movement as a transnational missionary organization is to point to its religious motivation. In my research I have come across a specific way of expressing this religious motivation that is repeated in the books written by Fethullah Gülen time and again: the desire to seek God's pleasure (Turkish: *rıza İlahi*) in everything.¹⁹ When he describes the »golden generation« (Turkish: *altın nesil*) a metaphor of the future generation of human beings devoted to God, he says:

see Ercan KARAKOYUN, Transnationaler Lokalpatriotismus: Der Beitrag der Gülen-Bewegung zur Integration von Muslimen in Deutschland, in: *ibid.*, 56-87.

¹⁷ Ercan KARAKOYUN / Karel STEENBRINK, The Hizmet Movement and the Integration of Muslims in Germany, in: ÇELİK/LEMAN/STEENBRINK (eds.), *Gülen-Inspired Hizmet* (fn. 7), 179-195, here 180.

¹⁸ AGAI, *Die Arbeit der Gülen-Bewegung in Deutschland* (fn. 16), 39.

¹⁹ See VALKENBERG, *Renewing Islam by Service* (fn. 4), 162-166.

»these devotees never desire to boast about themselves or to advertise or spread propaganda about themselves, nor are they ambitious to be well-known or appreciated. Instead, they endeavor, with all their might and strength, to reach the spiritual life and they depend all their acts in this regard on sincerity, intending merely to please God.«²⁰

If this is the spiritual core, what are its practical consequences? I propose a term that the Turkish scholar Ihsan Yilmaz has coined: *tajdid* or »renewal« by conduct.²¹ The best way to explain this is to look at the success of the Gülen-inspired schools. Their success does not depend on Islamic education but on the function of the teachers as models. Just as education is the most important feature of life for Fethullah Gülen, it is also the most important job in the Hizmet. This explains why the Gülen-inspired schools both in Turkey and abroad are so enormously successful: because of the dedication of the teachers who are willing to invest extra energy in their students since they see it as the best way to please God. Joshua Hendrick gives a somewhat more suspicious reading of the excellent results of the Gülen-inspired schools when he says that the good students can be attracted by offering extra services and discounts, and therefore the rational choice theory is able to explain a great deal of the success of the schools.²² That might be true, but my point here is that the teachers see themselves as models for a future generation, grateful for the opportunities that they have received, and willing to go the extra mile in order to give a future generation the same or better opportunities. To my mind, the willingness to go to other cultures and give non-Turkish and non-Muslim students the same opportunities forms the basis for the missionary endeavor that is unmistakably part of the Hizmet.

4 Three Areas of Missionary Work in the Hizmet

The notion of renewal by conduct shows that if it is possible to speak about the Hizmet Movement as a transnational missionary movement – as I think it is – then this movement is characterized by a model of mission that is different from the classical model. I will elaborate on this in the last part of my talk, but at this place I can draw a parallel with the shift in missionary methods that I remember clearly from my own education in the Roman Catholic Church: in the last third of the twentieth century, the interest in mission shifted entirely from the classical models of planting churches and saving souls for Christ to the new model of doing good and building social institutions for people in order to show them the love of Christ. In the 1970's in the Netherlands, the old missionary ideal was entirely replaced with the new ideal of developmental collaboration. Building schools, health centers and agricultural institutions became the new form of mission. In a similar way, the Hizmet renewed the missionary ideal of Islam, namely *da'wa* or »inviting people to Islam« to include education, dialogue institutions, and charity. The big question, of course, is: is this still *da'wa*? Does it still invite people to answer the call of Islam? I think it does, since most of the volunteers in the Hizmet Movement are deeply motivated by their Islamic faith, even

20 GÜLEN, Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance, Somerset N.J. 2004, 101.

21 Ihsan YILMAZ, *İjtihad and tajdid* by conduct: the Gülen Movement, in: M. Hakan YAVUZ / John L. ESPOSITO (eds.), *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: the Gülen Movement*, Syracuse 2003, 208-237.

22 HENDRICK, Gülen (fn. 10), 138-139.

23 My friend Alper Alasağ told me that there is a debate going on about this in the Hizmet, since some of its supporters argue that the movement should go back to its roots in a more *da'wa*-oriented style of service in the tradition of Said Nursi (conversation October 4, 2017).

24 See VALKENBERG, *Renewing Islam By Service* (fn. 4), chapter six: »Three Elements of Faith-Based Service«, 184-228.

25 Said NURSİ, *The Damascus Sermon*, trans. Şükran VAHİDE, İstanbul 1996. See also Thomas MICHEL, S.J., »Fighting Poverty with Kimse Yok Mu, « in: *Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives*

though they will be very hesitant to call their work a form of *da'wa*.²³ Yet I think the same can be said of many people working in contemporary missionary movements. At the end of my talk I will come back to this crucial question, but for now I want to give an idea of the three main areas in which the volunteers of the movement are working.²⁴

I have already sketched how Gülen started the Hizmet Movement by listening to the needs of the students in the 1970s in Izmir: their parents from rural settings wanted a safe environment for their children who studied in the »leftist« environment of that city. The priority of building educational facilities in the movement is a direct consequence of these needs, but it also matches with an important theme in Islamic spirituality: overcoming ignorance is one of the most important tasks for every Muslim. Consequently, Gülen points to ignorance as one of the most important problems in the contemporary Islamic world that he seeks to overcome by building educational institutions. But according to his analysis, disunity and poverty are important causes for backwardness and terrorism in the Islamic world as well. This analysis ultimately goes back to his own spiritual master Bediüzzaman Said Nursi who indicated six root causes of problems in the Islamic world in his famous Damascus sermon back in 1911.²⁵ So Gülen started to tackle ignorance by focusing on education in the 1970s. The first institutions took the form of boarding schools and homework classes; the first house was rented in Izmir in 1968 and the first dormitory was founded in 1971. It took some time before the political situation made it possible to build high schools, but the first, *Yamanlar Koleji*, was established in 1982, again in Izmir. From there the schools spread over Turkey, and the Turkic republics in the 1990s, and to other continents (Europe, North-America, Australia, Asia, Africa) in the 2000s. Nowadays, there might be as much as 1,000 schools in more than 100 countries all over the world. I have personally visited schools in Turkey, the United States, the Netherlands and Germany²⁶, and they all share common characteristics: no specific Islamic education, stress on multicultural and bi- or tri-lingual education (for instance German and Turkish, but also English in the schools in Berlin), and on natural sciences. Both students and teachers are very polite and very proud of their schools. Finally, the schools stand out as clean and neat, but austere. The money that is available is invested in education, not in nice looks or a fancy cafeteria. I should add, though, that these schools are not uncontested. You may know that all Gülen-inspired schools in Turkey needed to close under government pressure, and all teachers with known connections to the Hizmet are fired and many are even in jail (including their family members). In Europe, they can still function, but quite a few parents have withdrawn their children under pressure from AKP supporters. Some schools had to close and some religious leaders from state-founded Diyanet organization had to leave the Netherlands because they were in possession of lists with names of Hizmet members to be targeted.²⁷

The second field of service is dialogue. In this respect, again one can see Gülen's decision to engage in dialogue work in order to prevent disunity as a pragmatic and a principled decision at the same time. In the late 1980s the political situation in Turkey allowed more freedom while the old tensions between the secularist and the other parties – some of them

of the Gülen Movement, Conference Proceedings, Washington D.C. 2008, 523-533.

26 In May 2009 I visited a gymnasium school in Berlin-Spandau that was part of an organization with schools in Berlin, Cologne, Mannheim and Hannover. According to *Die Zeit* (July 19, 2017) there are now 25 schools in Germany. See <http://www.zeit.de/2017/30/guelen-bewegung-schulen-deutschland/komplettansicht> about the situation in Germany (accessed Oct. 5, 2017).

27 Information through <http://www.fhvzelm.com/blog/?p=4796> (accessed Oct. 5, 2017).

Islamist in nature, such as Erbakan's Welfare Party that was in power from 1995 until the »soft coup« of 1997 – still lingered on. The major foundation in this area was the Journalists and Writers Foundation, founded in 1994. Gülen wanted to establish a group of writers and journalists that could act as facilitators of dialogue processes in order to gain better relationships between the different parties in Turkey. The Journalists and Writers Foundation functions as an umbrella for a number of organizations in Turkey, among them the Abant Platform that organizes national conferences to bring together different political points of view. After 2000, some of the conferences have been organized outside of Turkey: in Washington D.C. (2004) and Brussels (2004, on Turkey's possible EU membership), but also in Erbil (northern Iraq) and Cairo (Egypt). The Intercultural Dialogue Platform has organized major conferences on Abraham as ancestor of three religions (Urfa 2000; Mardin 2004).

An initiative that is loosely connected with the Journalists and Writers Foundation is the organization of intercultural trips to Turkey. This is how many people outside of Turkey have come to know Turkey guided by a perspective from the Hizmet. Often, these trips include visits to religious and touristic sites, but also to the Journalists and Writers Foundation itself, to schools, hospitals and universities, press initiatives such as Zaman newspaper and Samanyolu TV, but also to local businesspeople. I mention this element because I think it is an important part of the mission of the Hizmet: establish good relationships between people from different cultures. Nowadays, it has become impossible for people related to the Hizmet to travel to Turkey, so they organize travels to other countries. The travel program of the Rumiform, the local branch of the intercultural dialogue program in the D.C. region, includes invitations to travel to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Australia, and Germany.²⁸ In the Netherlands, I have worked together with the Stichting Islam en Dialoog for a long time. Nowadays, the best information can be found on the website of the Hizmetbeweging.²⁹ In Germany, Ercan Karakoyu, who is the president of the *Dialog und Bildung* Foundation has recently written a book about the »Gülen Movement«.³⁰

The third missionary area in which the Hizmet has become active is the area of charity, meant to overcome poverty. In this case, activities have been developed quite a bit later than the activities in the other areas, and the activities are more centralized through one main actor: the *Kimse Yok Mu* Foundation, which can be translated as »Is there anybody who cares?« The foundation started after an earthquake in Turkey, and became a great success since it appealed to some basic religious notions, such as *sadaqa* (voluntary giving) and *himmet* (giving donations). When I was in Izmir with a group of scholars from Maryland in 2009, we visited *Şifa Hastanesi*, a hospital related to the Hizmet Movement. They heard that one of our members had been the prime minister of the Central African Republic in the 1980s, and they told us that they sent volunteers to help out in a hospital in Bangui, the capital of that nation. They also told us about a school that they developed in that nation five years ago. Nor was their activity limited to that country, since they established hospitals in Dubai and Northern Iraq, and send out volunteer doctors to five African countries. Two different groups of local businessmen that I met in Izmir in the same year told me about their plans to develop schools in Cameroon and proudly showed me the blueprints of the school that they were about to build.

28 See <http://rumiform.org/study-trips> (accessed Oct. 3, 2017).

29 <https://www.hizmetbeweging.nl/> (accessed Oct. 5, 2017).

30 Ercan KARAKOYUN, *Die Gülen Bewegung: was sie ist und was sie will*, Freiburg i. Br. 2017.

31 See the website of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps <http://www.jesuitvolunteers.org> and Teach for America <https://www.teachforamerica.org> (accessed Oct. 3, 2017).

32 AGAI, *Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs* (fn. 4); Berna TURAM, *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement*, Stanford CA 2007.

33 Helen Rose EBAUGH, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam*, Dordrecht 2010, 105.

So it is clear that much of the charity work of the Hizmet is centered around schools, because education is still its most important value that is exported across boundaries and can be called therefore a form of transnational missionary work. Yet other forms of charity that come closer to the use of the word charity in the Anglo-Saxon world are practiced as well. For instance, in the last two years I noticed how Rumi Forum and its sister organizations convene fundraising dinners for blanket drives to help Syrian refugees. At these dinners, organizers tell about the situation in the refugee camps and their plans to send help.

5 Motivations of the Teachers

I want to finish this exploratory overview of the Turkish Hizmet Movement as a transnational missionary movement with two final reflections. The first is about the motivation of the teachers in the Hizmet Movement, which is important because they are the real missionaries of his movement. In the ethos of the movement, teachers are the most important members since they engage in the »core business« of the organization. After all Gülen himself said to his German friends: stop building mosques, and start building schools. There are quite a few publications based on interviews with these teachers, talking about the success of the schools and what motivates them to go to different cultures and countries to teach young children instead of pursuing a more profitable career. By the way, the parallel here might be not so much between these teachers and classical Christian missionaries who leave for foreign destinations, but rather with young students in the United States who decide to devote one or more years to teach English to students who live in circumstances that are clearly less favorable than the circumstances in which they themselves grew up. For instance, developing themselves into »men and women for others« is a goal for many students at Jesuit institutions in the United States, and this goal is fostered through immersion trips during their study, but most specifically through service years after having obtained their bachelor's diploma.³¹

As I said, there are a couple of comprehensive studies based on interviews with the teachers in the Hizmet Movement. I have already mentioned Bekim Agai's book on the patterns of communication within the Hizmet network, but Berna Turam's book based on interviews with female teachers, and focusing on the ambiguity between private and public sides of the movement, has reached the status of a classic in the field as well.³² Sociologist Helen Rose Ebaugh summarizes the conclusion of most researchers as follows: »In addition to sharing a common culture of ideas and values, and as part of this culture, a major reason for the success of the Gülen institutions is the commitment and dedication of the personnel who run them.«³³ However, two recent publications have cast some doubt over this quite rosy image. They both argue, based on rational choice theory, that both teachers and students might also be driven by some less altruistic principles, since a Hizmet education helps them to gain a profitable network and a higher socio-economic position in society.³⁴ I have already discussed Hendrick's argumentation and his use of the notion of »strategic ambivalence«, so in the last part of my presentation I want to concentrate on Tittensor's book.³⁵

³¹ See HENDRICK, Gülen (fn.10); David TITTENSOR, *The House of Service: The Gülen Movement and Islam's Third Way*, New York 2014.

³² For a reply to Hendrick's argument from the side of a Christian ethicist, see Simon ROBINSON, *The Spirituality of Responsibility: Fethullah Gülen and Islamic Thought*, London 2017, 172-175.

6 Mission and Message: A Comparative Analysis

Just like the authors just mentioned, David Tittensor bases his thesis about the divergence between mission and message in the Hizmet Movement on interviews with teachers, but he adds students to the mix, and notices that the Hizmet was not as willing to share perspectives of the students as was the case with the teachers. What makes Tittensor's research most interesting for our purpose, though, is his conclusion that »despite it['s] protestations to the contrary, the Movement is very much a *da'wa* (missionary) organization.«³⁶ One of the elements that leads him to this conclusion is a comparison with World Vision, a Christian missionary organization, founded in the United States after the Korean War, with a goal to fight communism and spread the Gospel.³⁷ Again, this method of bringing religious people together against communist influences finds a parallel in the writings of Said Nursi. In the case of World Vision, it started as an Evangelical missionary organization but adapted its methods under influence of European resistance toward direct missionary methods. He argues that both organizations now engage in a relatively liberal form of proselytism, which he calls »lifestyle evangelism« in which there is a difference between the message conveyed and the mission implied. Yet, the point of Tittensor's book is that such an ambiguity in the case of a Muslim organization creates alarm and anxiety, while it is tacitly accepted in the case of a Christian organization.³⁸ This seems to be unfair.

I would like to end with one observation and one question. The observation is that the method of the Hizmet Movement reminds me of two specific missionary methods that are intimately connected with two methods of interreligious dialogue: the mission of presence and the mission of commitment to service. These methods are mentioned in two documents published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1991 and by its precursor, the Secretariat for non-Christians in 1984.³⁹ The document from 1984 mentions mission of presence and the mission of commitment to service as the first elements of mission, along with the liturgical life, dialogue and finally announcement and catechesis.⁴⁰ A bit further, the same document mentions four forms of dialogue, namely dialogue of life, dialogue of works, dialogue of experts and dialogue of religious experience.⁴¹ So, the model of presence in the life of religious others, and of collaboration in service with religious others can be seen both as a form of mission and as a form of dialogue, and they are arguably the basis for all other forms of mission and dialogue. I am quite sure that interviews with members of missionary congregations – for instance interviews with sisters of the Maryknoll congregation by Jeanine Hill Fletcher, but I know that there are rich resources in the Netherlands as well⁴² – would confirm the idea that »commitment to service« looms large among the motivations of many missionaries in the twentieth century. There seems to be a large amount of overlap between Christian and Muslim transnational missionary organizations on this

36 TITTENSOR, *The House of Service* (fn. 34), 9.
37 *Ibid.*, 144.

38 *Ibid.*, 89.

39 Both documents can be found in English translations in *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II* (1963-2005), ed. Francesco GIOIA, Boston 2006: »The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission« by the SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS (May 10, 1984) on pages 1116-1129; »Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreli-

gious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ« by the PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE jointly with the CONGREGATION FOR EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES (May 19, 1991) on pages 1156-1189.

issue, in the line of what St. Francis of Assisi suggested to his friars about their way to live among the Muslims. In chapter 16 of his *regula non bullata* he says: »One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake (1 Peter 2:13) and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see that it pleases the Lord, in order that they may believe«. ⁴³

Even though it is not so difficult to find a place for such a mission by service in the history of Christian concepts of mission, there is still a final question. I am quite convinced that most members of the *Hizmet* would deny that they are engaged in a form of mission or *da'wa*, and therefore they would consistently deny to have any missionary intention at all. Just like the majority of young people who serve in other countries on behalf of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps or similar organizations would probably deny having any missionary purpose. As Tittensor discussed, this might be related to the fact that *da'wa* or mission is not acknowledged as a valid goal of the organization for which they serve, even though service is. Theologians may think that the two are inherently connected, but if people themselves do not see or share that connection, how valid is it to speak about such an organization as a missionary organization? In other words: if people in the Hizmet do not share my analysis, how valid is it? From the point of view of a scholar, it is easy to say that I add a perspective that insiders may not share, but from the point of view of someone engaged in dialogue, I find it problematic to make assertions that cannot be shared by insiders. Yet if there is some debate about this within the Hizmet Movement, it makes sense for a Christian theologian to try to contribute to this debate by showing how the Christian tradition has accommodated service within its concept of mission. Of course, it is up to the members of the Hizmet Movement to determine whether they can recognize themselves in this picture of their movement as a transnational missionary movement. ♦

40 »The Attitude of the Church ... Dialogue and Mission« (fn. 39), no. 13, 1119.

41 Ibid., nos. 29-35, 1125-1126. Repeated in »Dialogue and Proclamation« (fn. 39), no. 42, 1171.

42 See Jeanine HILL FLETCHER, *Motherhood as Metaphor: Engendering Interreligious Dialogue*, New York 2013, and the documentation about interviews with Dutch missionaries at <http://www.ru.nl/kdc/geschiedenis/kommissiememoires> (accessed Oct. 4, 2017).

43 ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *Regula non bullata* or *Earlier Rule* (1221) as quoted in Steven J. MCMICHAEL, *Francis and the encounter with the sultan* (1219), in: Michael J. P. ROBSON (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi*, Cambridge 2012, 127-142, on 134-135.