



Who is Turkey's 'Calvin'

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In 1976 a Dutch economist named Leo van Velzen visited Kayseri. Van Velzen identified 1150 small enterprises in the old industrial zone of the city. 588 of these did furniture and carpentry related work. Most of the workshops were between 30 and 300 square metres. The workers had only saws, hammers and scissors in their hands. „It is not possible that trade capitalism will yield industrial capitalism in this city." In the days this observation was made, a businessman of Kayseri, Mustafa Boydak and his brothers went to the largest furniture fair of Europe. Their goal was to obtain the most developed technology for furniture production.

Boydak said that "the era of making furniture with hammers and saws is over". Four years after these words, Boydak's firm would trigger a "furniture revolution" and introduce the çek-yat [(literally 'pull-sleep'), a sofa that folds out to make a bed] to the market and this would become the widest selling product of the furniture sector. Kayseri would undergo an amazing industrial revolution from the 1990s on... What was the secret of this explosion which the Dutch economist had not foreseen?

Now it is this that we discuss. And today in Hürriyet we publish the executive summary of the report which analyzes this development. People of Kayseri themselves attribute the development to a process among Muslims of Turkey similar to that which Christian European societies experienced as a result of "Protestant Ethics. They see a reform similar to that which Calvin initiated in Europe. Now let's come to the real question.

What are the main arteries of "Islamic Calvinism", or in other words, the "reform of mentalities" such as the one of the Protestants? The report includes the views of Turkish sociologist Hakan Yavuz. Yavuz says the primary artery is the Sufi current in Anatolia. The second source he gives is surprising for a secular Turk. The Turkish sociologist claims Said-i Nursi started the reform of Islam and emphasizes the following:

"without a proper understanding of the Nur movement and its societal impact, one cannot grasp the peaceful and gradual mobilisation of an Islamic identity movement in Turkey". What comes to all of our minds is also asked by those who prepared the report: "Is the rise of 'Islamic Calvinism' among Kayseri's entrepreneurs a cause of their commercial success (as per Max Weber), or has increasing prosperity led them to embrace interpretations of Islam that emphasise its compatibility with the modern world?" The answer of this important question in the report is this „It is difficult to conclude ...“Two more striking yet speculative questions: What is the number of "Islamic Calvinists" in Turkey? If we were to calculate this according to the number of the followers of the Nur Movement, the number the report gives is as follows: "The movement's adherents in Turkey are estimated at between 5 and 6 million."

Now lets arrive at the most critical question. Who is the intellectual leader of this "Calvinist Muslim" or "Protestant Muslim" movement which drives the new thinking of the economy of Turkey? The report does not answer this question. However, in my view, judged by widespread presence in the economy and the global effects, the leader of the "Calvinist Muslim" movement is Fethullah Gülen. When I read this report I believed the following: It's time to read the books of the late Prof. Sabri Ülgener more carefully.