

## Article

# Tajdid (Renewal) by Embodiment: Examining the Globalization of the First Mosque Open Day in Australian History

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**Abstract:** The concepts of *tajdid* (renewal) and *mujaddid* (renewer) in Islam are discussed mainly in scholarly works. Although all Muslim scholars agree on the necessity of *tajdid*, they differ regarding the scope of *tajdid*, who the *mujaddids* are, and their primary role. Most scholars agree that the primary duty of the *mujaddid* is to restore or lead to restore correct religious knowledge and practice and eradicate the errors from the past century. Renewal of correct religious practice can be local or global. This article first briefly discusses the notions of *tajdid* and *mujaddid*. Secondly, it examines the first “mosque open day” initiated by the Australian Intercultural Society (AIS) and Affinity Intercultural Foundation (AIF) in 2001 before the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US. A mosque open day gradually has become a common practice of most mosques in Australia and has been globalized by Muslim minorities worldwide. This paper examined about 240 pages of results via the Google search engine and 500 pages of results via the Yahoo search engine, and the AIS’s and AIF’s archives about mosque open days. This paper argues that the globalization of mosque open days can be considered a renewal of an Islamic tradition.

**Keywords:** *Tajdid*; renewal; Australian Muslims; Said Nursi; Hizmet Movement; mosque open day; Muslims in the West; Australian Intercultural Society; Fethullah Gülen; Affinity Intercultural Society



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## 1. Introduction

The concepts of *tajdid* and *mujaddid* have been discussed since the second century of Islam, particularly during the Muslim world’s social, spiritual, and political crisis. The discussion about *tajdid* has evolved through the prophetic tradition. Prophet Muhammed said, “Allah will raise for this community at the end (or beginning) of every hundred years the one who will renovate its religion for it” (Abu Dawud n.d.). Although there is an agreement about the authenticity of the hadith, there are various opinions among Muslim scholars on what the *tajdid* is and its scope, who the *mujaddid* (renewalist/revivalist) of every century is, and the criteria of being a *mujaddid*. The attributes of the *mujaddid* and their role in *tajdid* have been extensively discussed. This research will contribute to the field of renewal in Islamic studies by focusing on how the mosque open day began in Australia and then gradually became a practice in the Western world. Historically, the mosques were not just places of worship but also functioned as the centres for education, welfare and unity of the society, regardless of ethnicity or religious background. However, after colonization, mosques gradually reduced in scope and eventually became merely places of worship. This article first will briefly discuss the concept of *tajdid*. Secondly, it will shed light on Said Nursi’s (d.1960) renewal approach to Christian Muslim relations and how his view was applied globally by the Hizmet Movement. Finally, it will examine the first mosque open day in Melbourne and Sydney by Hizmet affiliates before the September 11 terrorist attack. However, how other mosques or Islamic organizations worldwide have become pillars of inspiration, requires further research.

## 2. *Tajdid* and *Mujaddid*

*Tajdid* and *mujaddid* is a well-discussed topic by the scholars. Kamali argues that *tajdid* is a broad and comprehensive concept that he calls “civilisational renewal” (Kamali 2018, p. 144). Muhammed al-Ghazali (d.1997) states that *tajdid* is a divine sunnah (Al-Ghazali and Musa 2009, H1430/2009). According to Turner, *tajdid* happens when necessity dictates (Turner 1998 in (Yilmaz 2003)). *Tajdid* can be categorized as *amm* (general), which consists of the entire renewal as Kamali calls civilisational renewal, or *khass* (specific), which consists of part renewal, such as *tajdid* in education or *tajdid* in spiritual life. *Tajdid* can also be classified as internal, which aims for spiritual renewal, and external, which proposes societal renewal.

Most scholars agree that the responsibility of *mujaddid* is to renew the *sunnah* and eradicate the *bid'a*, innovations. They also agree that “the function of the *mujaddid* is the restoration both of correct religious knowledge and of practice, and act as its corollary the refutation and eradication of error” (Algar 2001, p. 295). Doi asserts that “the ultimate purpose of *tajdid* is to establish the truth and remove falsehood and overthrow tyrannical order and establish the justice in the land” (Doi 1987, p. 213). However, most of the *mujaddids* in Islamic history did not get involved in politics and avoided taking any position in the government except Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (d.720), who is considered the first *mujaddid*. In my view, the *mujaddids* primarily aimed for a spiritually healthy society and preferred people’s happiness in the hereafter, over worldly happiness. This primary aim of *mujaddids* is less discussed in academia than the renewal of the worldly affairs of society.

While some scholars view *mujaddid* as a single person in each century, others argue that *mujaddid* is not one person but a group. Said Shabbar views “renewal as a movement initiated by one or more individuals, while others view it as a movement initiated by an entire community” (Shabbar 2018, p. 12). His view is based on well-known scholars such as Ibn al-Athir (d.1233), Imam Nawawi (d.1277) Al-Dahahabi (d.1348) and al-Suyuti’s (d.1505) interpretation of the above-mentioned *hadith*. Al-Nawawi asserted that “it is possible that the emergence of *mujaddid* in every century to be in the form of a group of people from various backgrounds and areas corresponding to their grandeur and expertise such as in worship, *fiqh*, *hadith*, *tafsir* (interpretation)” (Ismail et al. 2017, p. 188). Although there is no unanimous agreement among the scholars, Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (d.720), Imam Shafi’i (d.820), Imam Bukhari (d.870), Imam al-Ghazali (d.1111), Ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328), Jalaludin al-Suyuti (d.1505), Uthman Dan Fodio (d.1817), Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi (d.1944) and Said Nursi are considered to be *mujaddids*. Al-Suyuti asserts that the *mujaddid* exercises wide influence through his person, students, and followers. He also asserts that *mujaddid* should come from the *Ahl Al-Bayt* (offspring of the Prophet) (Algar 2001). However, some *mujaddids*, such as Imam Shafi’i (d.820), Imam Bukhari (d.870) and Ahmad al-Faruqi al-Sirhindi (d.1624), are not from *Ahl Al-Bayt*. The determination of *mujaddid* is based on “predominant opinion (*galabat al-zann*) among scholars contemporary with him and by means of the benefit is had from him, his companions and from his writings” (al-Suyuti cited in (Algar 2001, p. 296)).

Al-Qaradawi also asserts that *tajdid* cannot be performed by a single person but by a group that works together in the interests of truth (Shabbar 2018). “There is consensus also that the *mujaddid* must be a scholar” (Algar 2001, p. 295). He is not just a scholar in religious sciences, but should also have knowledge in secular sciences at an encyclopedic level. After examining the scholarly sources regarding the *mujaddids’* biographies, it can be said that *mujaddids* were ‘walking sunnah’ who reflected the time they lived in. Furthermore, they were bestowed with *ilm mawhiba* (gifted knowledge). It is the knowledge of the inner dimension that can be gained through devotion, compassion, love, suffering, tears, worship, and *dhikr* (remembrance of God), besides acquiring traditional knowledge. It is an inspiration (*ilham*) that manifests in the heart, mind, and action.

Muslim scholars paid more attention to the notion of *tajdid* after the collapse of the Islamic civilization and colonization of the Muslim world, which caused various types of crises (Ali 2003, 2014). During this period, there was an emergence of many Islamic leaders or faith groups aiming for the salvation of faith, the restoration of Islamic law and ethical

principles in Muslim lands. “Their emergence is deeply embedded in the sociological reality of the Muslim world” (Ali and Orifino 2018, p. 48). While some leaders and scholars blamed external powers for the crises, others focused on society’s social, spiritual, and political illnesses.

Said Nursi was an Ottoman and Turkish Republican scholar who is considered a *mujaddid* (Algar 2001; Nursi 2007a; Voll 1999; Keskin 2019; Ansari 2017)<sup>1</sup>. He viewed the causes of crises as coming from within Muslims. To him, the main reasons for the collapse of the Islamic civilization were the literalistic and scholastic approaches to the Islamic sciences that caused people’s weaknesses in faith. Nursi believed that for a successful external *tajdid*, the internal *tajdid* was necessary. Without internal *tajdid*, religion would be a dry theology and a non-practice, a set of dogma such as human ideologies. He also identified major reasons for the collapse of the Islamic civilization: the lack of hope, truthfulness, and unity in the Muslim society, and despotism or a lack of freedom in politics and preference for individual interest over the common good (Nursi 1996a). Nursi viewed ignorance, poverty, and disunity as the major enemies of the Muslim world (Law 2017).

In his Friday sermon at the Umayyad Mosque in 1911, Said Nursi indicated the importance of renewal regarding Christian–Muslim relations when Christians occupied almost half of the Muslim lands. He validated the difference between the two religions. He proposed to abstain temporarily from the discussion and debate of points of difference to strive against irreligiosity or absolute unbelief, which harms both faiths’ moral values (Nursi 1996a). Nursi foresaw the impact of globalization in the early 20th century.

While most Islamic movements in the modern era primarily focused on the renewal of Islamic law, economy, and politics according to *Sharia* principles, Nursi persistently centered the renewal and reinterpreting of the issues of Islamic faith in the modern era. He aimed first to embody the perfections of Islam and the true faith with virtuousness in the individual conscience. His renewal methodology is more “embodied-spiritual” rather than externalizing the religion in appearance only. Nursi calls this *tamsil*, which means the inadvertent overspill of genuine practice (Keles 2014). He wanted to form a spiritually and socially healthy society through this methodology.

Nursi focused on *imani* (faith-related) *tajdid*, which he believed was under attack from materialistic philosophy, behind the mask of sciences since the late 19th century. He theorized the renewal principles in his magnum opus, *Risale-i Nur*. For Nursi, “the *Risale-i Nur* provides irrefutable, rational, and convincing evidence against claims of materialistic philosophy” (Nursi 2007b, p. 257). It also enables the believer to gain faith by investigative certainty (*tahkiki iman*) from blind faith by imitation (*taklidi iman*) (Algar 2001). Nursi suggests that “*Risale-i Nur* is a product of *fayz* (a sublime effusion) and he is the spokesperson or interpreter of it” (Nursi 2007a, p. 24). Due to 34 years of Jacobin secularists inflicting oppression, persecution, imprisonment, and exile, Nursi could not put his philosophy of renewal into practice. This was not the destiny of Nursi only but almost all *mujaddids* in Islamic history. They became influential after their deaths, just as Nursi did.

Influenced by Nursi, Fethullah Gülen,<sup>2</sup> a Turkish Islamic scholar, also validated the difference between two faiths and historical conflicts. However, bringing the differences, historical conflicts, and polemics to the table, will not necessarily prevent conflict. Gülen proposed cooperation between civilizations as an alternative to the clash of civilizations. Like Nursi, he wanted Muslims to focus on common points regarding Muslim and non-Muslim relations.

### 3. Gülen’s Approach to Renewal

Fethullah Gülen, the founder and spiritual leader of the Hizmet Movement reads the Prophet’s life as comprising 90% *tamsil* or role modelling. To him, religious values can be carried out through *tamsil* (Yucel 2011). Under his spiritual leadership, the Hizmet Movement put Nursi’s renewal philosophy into practice in spirituality, education, and social life but did not, or could not, do so in politics. Yilmaz (Yilmaz 2003, p. 208) argues that “the movement that has evolved around the ideas of the charismatic figure of Fethullah

Gülen provides an example of a renewal with a potential for influencing the Muslim world". He also suggests, "Gülen has reinterpreted Islamic understanding in tune with contemporary times and has developed and put into practice a new Muslim discourse with respect to some traditionally sensitive issues" (Yilmaz 2003, p. 209). Gülen took Said Nursi's principles of theoretical foundations and applied them in his own life (Saritoprak 2011). He also put these principles into practice in the Hizmet Movement's social and educational activities. Like Nursi, Gülen believed that without inner *tajdid*, establishing a morally and socially healthy society was impossible.<sup>3</sup> When commenting on this, Gülen said that "people's ears are full but their eyes are hungry for role models" (Yucel 2011, p. 65) in all areas of life, including educational institutions. In his philosophy, representation comes before communication or *tabligh* preaching.

Gülen grew up and lived in a Jacobin secular state where every public and educational activity related to religion was under (and remains under) state control and the scrutiny of the Turkish intelligence services. Teaching religion was initially banned in public education until the 1980s and then limited to one or two hours in public schools. Promoting irreligiosity was the state policy. Girls or women wearing headscarves were not allowed to study in schools or universities. Oppression and persecution were common for those who wanted to serve the religion.

While other Islamic groups and Muslim scholars established mostly unofficial religious institutions as the regime allowed them, the Hizmet Movement started opening private secular educational institutions such as tutoring centers, schools, and universities in the early 1980s and continued to do so until 2015. The Jacobin secularists, particularly the army, scrutinized the Hizmet Movement's educational and social activities. Due to a lack of freedom of religious education, the Hizmet affiliates aimed to teach Islamic moral values through role modelling in their *dershanes* (student houses), dormitories, tutoring centers, schools and universities, on top of the secular education they provided. It is estimated that over sixteen million students (mostly lower and middle class) were educated in these institutions between 1980–2016, according to the educational coordinator (personal communication, Yavuzlar 2021). Such types of education have led to intellectual and moral renewal in Turkey. Yilmaz calls this "*tajdid* by conduct" (Yilmaz 2003).

In light of Nursi's theory of renewal and Gülen's interpretation, the Hizmet Movement has internalized religion and successfully applied social and educational activities in more than 160 countries (Yucel 2011). Embodying or internalizing the religion was not an option but was necessary in the Jacobin secularist state of Turkey and the secular world, where religion, especially Islam, is mostly seen as a threat or at best, a private issue. It can be said that the Hizmet Movement affiliates have focused on Islamic moral values, which are universal more than *Sharia* law.

Based on Nursi's theory and Gülen's explanation, Hizmet affiliated individuals initiated interfaith relations with non-Muslims in Turkey in early 1992 and then throughout the world, including Australia. Local non-governmental organizations were established to build bridges between Muslims and non-Muslims in 2000. These included the Australian Intercultural Society (AIS) in Melbourne and Affinity Intercultural Foundation (AIF) in Sydney. These organizations were established before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, an incident that created more fear of Islam and Muslims, as well as distrust, suspicion, and violence against Muslims. At this point, there were some scholarly arguments that Islamic values contradict democracy, pluralism, and secularism, thus, Muslims in the West could not integrate into society. The AIS aims "to serve as a catalyst in enhancing mutual understanding and respect in this multicultural nation of ours" (AIS 2000). To date, the AIS and AIF have implemented countless events and projects aimed at fusing the Australian community around the concept of "understanding through interaction" (AIF 2000).

#### 4. Limitations

This paper examined online English sources on Yahoo and Google between January 2001 and March 2022. It is possible that there could have been other mosque open day



attempts prior to 2001 in non-English speaking countries, or the organizers might not have publicized it online. The author attempted to reach out to the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California about their first mosque open day in 2002. However, the author was unsuccessful. The aim was to find out who inspired them for such a project. Hizmet affiliates have discussed the benefit of mosque open days in their global interfaith dialogue meeting. Whether there were other mosque open days throughout the rest of the world that was inspired by the mosque open day in Australia requires further research.

## 5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article will be based on an analysis of Nursi's theory of renewal through "persuasion" not force and the data analysis of a mosque open day. To Nursi, persuasion should be used to convince people in the modern age via *tamsil*, which can be called embodiment of religion. Thus, he proposes using persuasion over force, proactive responses over aggressive reactions, and peace over disorder (Vahide 2005). Having witnessed the horror of the first and second World Wars, Nursi believed that time had abrogated using power. Nursi also believed that since almost 90% of Islamic values are universal, this could be conveyed with the embodiment of the religion, which can be called *tamsil* in Turkish. Nursi discussed the embodiment of religion in the early 20th century. He applied it himself and with a small group in his study circle. Due to the lack of freedom of teaching and practising religion in the newly established Republic of Turkey in 1923, he could not reach out to wider society.

Embodying religion for social changes has been discussed in the academic literature in the last two decades. Mellor and Shilling (2010) examine Max Weber and Emile Durkheim's works regarding the embodiment of aspects of religion in a secular and modern society. Mellor and Shilling argue that "religiosity is not just a matter of beliefs and values, but is to do with lived experiences, practical orientations, sensory forms of knowing and patterns of physical accomplishment and technique that impact upon day-to-day lives in far-reaching ways" (Mellor and Shilling 2010, p. 217). Jones (2019) analyses embodied religiosity in human understanding mainly from Christian and secular perspectives. Although his work focuses on the embodiment of other religions, particularly Christianity and Buddhism, it neglects Islam. Nikkel (2019) discusses a theory of the embodied nature of religion from various philosophical perspectives, which Islam considers the primordial state (*fitrah*) of the human being.

For Nursi, embodying the religion is more important than proselytizing. One of the best examples of embodying the religion is mosque open day. Based on the author's data, the mainstream media coverage was quite positive regarding mosque open days worldwide. It was attractive and welcomed by the politicians, faith leaders and the local people. According to the organizers, it contributed to the reduction of fear of Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, it built bridges between different faiths and communities and somewhat placed Islam on the centre stage with the Mosque open day, and this, therefore, is a form of Islamic revivalism because it brings both Muslims and non-Muslims towards better and greater recognition of Islam and gives Islam a boost.

## 6. The First Mosque Open Day in Australia: A Local Renewal

### 6.1. Can a Non-Muslim Enter a Mosque?

Similar to every place of worship, there are rules and ethics regarding using mosques. Authentic *hadiths* tell us that the Prophet Muhammed received non-Muslim individuals and Christian delegations from Najran in his mosque (Salama 2018). Muslim jurists set the rules for Muslims and non-Muslims entering and using mosques. Whoever enters it should be in a state of purity. Scholars have different opinions regarding non-Muslims, menstruating women, and a Muslim adult who has not performed ablution or is not wearing the appropriate dress code. The jurists discussed the issue in detail based on each case. There are three major points of view. The first group of scholars expressed the view of not allowing polytheists but allowing Christians and Jews with appropriate dress codes.

The second group allowed all if they would like to learn about Islam or see how Muslims perform the ritual prayer, how they treat each other, and learn about their character. The third group, which is the minority view, does not allow the entering of non-Muslims or adult Muslims without ablution, and views the entering of menstruating women as *makruh* (disliked) (Al-Qurtubi 2014). Most scholars gave *fatwa* (edict) for allowing them to enter mosques, except for *Masjid al-Haram* (Ka'bah).

Although there is no unanimous agreement among the Muslim jurists regarding the entering of non-Muslims into mosques, most of them allowed non-Muslims to enter, subject to certain conditions. Hanafi, Shafi'i and Hanbali scholars hold that non-Muslims can enter all mosques except for the Ka'bah. Some Maliki scholars maintain that non-Muslims should not enter a mosque except for a necessity (Dar al-ifta.org n.d.).

During the classical period in Muslim lands, churches, mosques, and synagogues were places where Muslims, Christians, and Jews interacted with each other. For example, in Cyprus, Muslims, Christians, and Jews would cook food and take it to each other during their holidays such as *Eid*, Christmas, and Hanukah (Yucel 2010b). This was a custom in Jerusalem as well when it was under Ottoman rule.

Muslims performed their ritual prayer side by side with Christians in Syria for centuries (Ibn Hawqal cited in Carlson 2015). The cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Damascus had a portion set aside for Muslim prayers. In some villages in the eastern part of Anatolia, half of a building would be used as a mosque while the other half as an Armenian church before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. There was interaction between the worshippers. In 638, Caliph Umar visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus was baptized (Yucel 2013). Interaction can be observed in Lebanon where almost half the population is Christian, and the other half is Muslim. Such customs contributed to social harmony. However, this practice has been neglected or forgotten in Muslim lands over time.

## 6.2. The First Mosque Open Day in Australia

Living in Australia since 1987, the author did not witness or hear of any mosque open day until 2001. None of the Islamic organizations attempted to have a mosque open day. Research shows that there were no mosque open days in Australia prior to 2001 (Sneddon 2021). This paper examined about 240 pages of results via the Google search engine and 500 pages of results via the Yahoo search engine, as well as the AIS and AIF archives regarding mosque open days. The author did not find any news items regarding mosque open days in any English-speaking country before September 11, 2001, except an AIS mosque open day in Melbourne, which was covered by the local Turkish Zaman Australia. The second one was on September 2, 2001, at Gallipoli Mosque in Sydney organized by the Affinity Intercultural Foundation. (Dunn et al. 2015; Polat 2001). The State Minister of Turkey Sukru Sinai Gurel who was on an official visit to Australia also visited Gallipoli Mosque and was briefed about mosque open day. The third mosque open day was organized at a Turkish mosque in Broadmeadows, Victoria. Local members of parliament, councilors from Hume City, non-Muslim clergies and neighbors participated. Hizmet affiliated educated members of the community provided tours and responded to the questions of attendees (Polat 2002, January 28). After September 11 terrorist attack, the mainstream media began to cover mosque open days in Australia. In my view, there were three possible reasons that Muslims did not consider mosque open days. The first was due to a lack of necessity. Muslims did not feel a need for it. The second was a lack of role modelling. The first generation of Muslim immigrants in the West came from countries where mosque open days did not exist. The third reason is the neglect or misunderstanding of the majority view of jurists who allow non-Muslims to enter mosques, but preferring the minority jurists' view who did not permit non-Muslims to enter a mosque without ablution in the classical period.

I discussed the first mosque open day with a Hizmet affiliate Orhan Cicek who was the executive director of the AIS between 2000–2010 via Zoom, phone calls and emails (personal communication with Cicek 2022, March 22–29). I asked about the origin of the

idea for a mosque open day project. Inspired by Nursi's above mentioned Damascus Sermon and Gülen's interfaith dialogue philosophy, he held that the political, social and religious conditions of the world at that time compelled them to hold an open day. In addition, they aimed to strive against prejudices and misconceptions of Islam and Muslims. The mistrust and fear of Muslims grew after the collapse of communism and the Iraq war in 1991. After the collapse of communism in 1990, Bernard Lewis' clash of civilizations theory was further developed by Samuel Huntington, then institutionalized and politicized with media support throughout the world. The actions of some Muslim extremist groups further fuelled mistrust and increased the fear of Islam and Muslims, particularly in the West. On the one hand, fighting against growing radicalism had become state policy in many countries, including Australia. On the other hand, prejudices and physical attacks towards Muslims were increasing. Gradually, it had become a threat to social harmony. Muslims were seen as a threat, particularly in Western countries. According to Cicek, the second motivation behind the idea was Said Nursi's new theory on Christian-Muslim relations, which is set out in his work, *Risale-i Nur*, and applied by Hizmet affiliates in Turkey in the early 90s and onwards when there was political tension between secularists and Muslim groups, including the Hizmet Movement. During this tense and divided period, the Movement organized *iftar* (breakfast) dinners during Ramadan and reached out to non-Muslims (who were scapegoats) and secularists in order to build social harmony. The motto was 'the art of living together'. It can be said that the Hizmet affiliates saw the benefit of reaching out to non-Muslims and secularists in light of Nursi's philosophy about Christian-Muslim relations.

Nursi had once been posed a question in relation to returning to the glory days of the Ottoman Empire before its collapse. Nursi said, "I will say one thing; perhaps you could memorize it (which means is very important in Turkish culture): the previous state is obsolete; it is either the new state or total annihilation (*İşte, eski hâl muhal; ya yeni hâl veya izmihlâl*), which means that it is not possible to return the glory days of the Ottomans. There is a need for renewal and it is essential. Otherwise, it will be total annihilation" (Nursi n.d.). His renewal philosophy included a new approach to Christians-Muslims relations as mentioned above.

In the mid-1930s, Nursi also wrote about the importance of collaboration between Muslims and Christians. He said,

It is even recorded in authentic traditions of the Prophet that at the end of time, the truly pious among the Christians will unite with the People of the Qur'an and fight their common enemy: irreligion. And at this time, too, the people of religion and truth need to unite sincerely not only with their own brothers and fellow believers, but also with the truly pious and spiritual ones from among the Christians, stop temporarily from the discussion and debate of points of difference in order to combat their joint enemy: aggressive atheism. (Nursi 1996b, p. 204)

According to Cicek, Nursi realized the impact of globalization. He foresaw that irreligiosity and debauchery would be harmful to humanity and there would be a great need for collaboration between adherents of different faiths, particularly Christianity and Islam. After the September 11 attacks, there was a risk of radicalization of some Muslims due to their vulnerability in Western countries. He added how Nursi believed that "persuasion" was necessary for renewal instead of force (Nursi 1996a, p. 79).

According to Cicek, after moving to the US in 1999, Gülen felt the necessity of interfaith dialogue, not only as a remedy against Islamophobia and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, but also to prevent radicalization. Based on all these reasons, the board members of the AIS agreed to organize the mosque open day. However, initially they had little idea on how to do it. After a lengthy discussion, the board identified university open days as a model and adopted it for the mosque open day.

The AIS approached many mosques' administrations in Victoria, but they were not interested or were against the idea due to juristic or cultural reasons. Initially, they faced

considerable resistance from the Muslim community. Cicek pointed out that Muslims immigrated to Australia with their traditional and cultural understanding of Islam. Some were reactionary to having non-Muslims in mosques due to non-Muslims' lack of ablution, hence a state of spiritual impurity; it is a requirement to have *wudu* (ablution) for entering a mosque for spiritual and physical purity. Many Muslims lived in lower socioeconomic suburbs with other migrants and may not have had strong relations with their non-Muslim neighbors due to language barriers, as well as cultural and religious differences. Cicek continued,

On the other hand, Australians had a negative conception about Islam and Muslims because of the conflicts between Christians and Muslims for many centuries. The September 11 terrorist attack and Iraq war triggered that historical mindset. This caused more mistrust and prejudice against Muslims. (Cicek 2022, Personal communication, 23 March 2022)

Whenever there was a terrorist attack or conflict within Muslim countries, the *hijab* wearing women were attacked and mosques were vandalized. According to Cicek, the mosque open day aimed to foster a greater understanding of the Muslim religion and culture. It would help Muslims integrate into the society and reduce radicalization among the Muslim youth, which was important for social harmony. On the other hand, it would help alleviate Islamophobia, overcome mistrust and prejudices against Muslims, and build rapport with a wider community.

Cicek and his colleague approached Ibrahim Dellal (d.2018), a leading figure in the Muslim community and board member of Sunshine Mosque in Victoria. Ibrahim talked to the mosque board members but there was resistance due to the high possibility of disapproval and a negative reaction from the mosque's congregation. After discussion with the board members for weeks, they agreed to have a mosque open day at Sunshine Mosque outside of Muslim prayer times. The open day preparation took months. Twelve young Australian-Turkish men and women who were to serve as guides, were educated about the mosque architecture as well as being prepared for the possible questions by participants.

The AIS invited senior Christian leaders, Jewish leaders, the consul generals of the US, UK, and some consul generals of Muslim countries, as well as locals. Flyers about the open day were distributed to the neighbors of the mosque as well. Members of the media were invited, including those from ABC and SBS. However, before September 11, 2001, the media was not interested in covering a mosque open day. The author could not identify the exact date of the first mosque open day but found that it was sometimes in July 2001.

More than 300 non-Muslims turned up for the first mosque open day. The visitors were divided into groups of 10. Each group was guided by a mosque tour guide and informed about the mosque architecture, the place of the mosque in Islam, the basics of what Islam is and who Muslims were. The organizers answered questions at the end of the tour. The *adhan* (call to prayer) was called and two *rakats* (units) of *nafla* (supererogatory) prayers were performed to allow non-Muslims to observe how ritual prayer is performed in a mosque. Some Muslim families had prepared and brought finger food to display their hospitality.

According to the stories I have collected from the organizers, it seemed that many participants harbored negative thoughts. Some feared the threat that Islam and Muslims posed to society and to civilization overall. One visitor said that when she passed by the mosque and saw the minarets, she thought they resembled Saddam Hussein's missiles. Another visitor thought Muslims prayed to a different God than Christians. A student came to the door of the mosque and was hesitant to enter. She thought Muslims prayed to the devil. Some people were suspicious that Muslims hid something in the mosques. Seeing people with beards around the mosque reminded some of Osama bin Laden. They thought women were forced to serve their husbands and wear the *hijab*. One participant who lived near the mosque indicated that she was suspicious about Muslims. Most of them were not aware of what happened in a mosque. They asked why Muslim men can have



four wives. There were questions about whether Australian Muslims practiced female genital mutilation. One of the non-Muslim neighbors shared this:

The construction of this mosque began 15 years ago. I would pass by and was curious about what was going on in the mosque. The people would come for the prayers and park their cars in my street. Every Friday, many people would attend. Twice a year, there would be a huge gathering with hundreds of attendants. I was very curious about this mosque and what Muslims were doing in the mosque. When I saw Muslims with beards and turbans, I was afraid. Now, I know what the mosque is and who Muslims are. (personal communication, March 22, 2022)

According to the mosque open day guides, many people were relieved that Islam had peaceful teachings and that Muslims were opening to them, showing their faith, and sharing their culture. Overall, it successfully bridged the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims and reassured many people in an era of fear.

Some Muslims harshly criticized the AIS and AIF mosque open days. They thought it was an innovation (*bid'a*) that contradicted the tradition of the Prophet. Some literalists argue that any practice that was not undertaken by the Prophet and four rightly guided caliphs is innovation and, therefore, must be rejected. They even argued that the AIS and AIF were watering down Islam. According to the organizers, some fundamentalists and political Islamists accused the AIS and AIF of creating an ecumenical new religion that combined Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Ironically, those Muslims who criticized AIS and AIF for the mosque open day project, began to have mosque open days in their places of worship after 2010.

The organizing of mosque open days before the September 11 terrorist attack shows the event as being proactive, instead of reactionary. The AIS Executive Director encouraged thirty-five Hizmet interfaith dialogue organizations to organize mosque open days when they had a global consultation meeting in Germany, before September 11 terrorist attacks. According to the AIF data, the mosque open days in Melbourne and Sydney inspired other Muslims. The AIS invited Imam Fahmi al-Naja (d.2016), the former Grand Mufti of Australia, and some local *imams* and presented the positive results of the mosque open day. All were convinced to have mosque open days for their respective mosques. The Lakemba and Penhurst Mosque's administration in Sydney approached the AIF and asked for their support to host a mosque open day. After the September 11 attacks, other Islamic organizations were compelled to reach out to their non-Muslim neighbors. Mosque open days have become a vehicle for striving against the fear of Islam and Muslims. The mainstream media have also started to cover mosque open days positively. This paper found that mosque open days have gradually spread across Australia. After the killing of a police accountant, Curtis Cheng, by a Muslim terrorist in Parramatta, there were anti-Islam rallies over the following weekend. Approximately one week later, subsequent to the rallies, a group chanted anti-Islam slogans where the Friday prayer was held in Parramatta. To reduce the tensions, the Lebanese Muslim Association set up the National Day of Unity at the Federal Parliament House where fifty representatives from different faiths participated, which occurred on 13 October 2015." The National Mosque Open Day was launched by the Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at Parliament House as part of National Day of Unity. The Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and the Greens Leader Richard Di Natale also participated" (Ireland 2015). The Islamic Council of Victoria officially began promoting and coordinating mosque open days Victoria, in 2017.

## 7. Discussion

*Tajdid* means renewal in Islam, but it does not mean introducing something that contradicts the core principles of the religion. It is rediscovering a neglected tradition, or an issue related to the faith and presenting it according to the needs of the age. It is akin to purifying the water and serving it in a nice new glass instead of an old cup. Gradualism is a divine tradition. Some may call it a natural law that is reflected in the universe. The renewal of the issues related to faith and their application occur gradually. The *mujaddid*

plants the seed of renewal and asserts that this seed will grow and become a fruitful tree in the future. Watering the seed of renewal, fertilizing the growing plant, pruning the sapling, and offering the fruits to people are the duties of future generations. If the biographies of *mujaddids* are examined, it can be noticed that renewal takes decades, sometimes centuries. For example, the impact of the works of the great jurist Imam al-Shafi'i, who is considered the *mujaddid* of the second century of Islam, was greatly felt after his death, and continues to this day. The same thing can be said of Imam Bukhari's (d.870) work.

Nursi planted the seed of renewal in his work *Risale-i Nur*, primarily when covering faith and some social issues, including Christian-Muslim relations. The Hizmet Movement has taken his theory of renewal and applied it to education and relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. As mentioned above, Nursi's methodology is based on persuasion and convincing people, not using force. This paper shows that the AIS and AIF were established in light of Nursi and Gülen's works, leading to the initiation of the first mosque open days in Australia. The aim of the open days was to address prejudices, misconceptions, and radicalization, as well as to defuse the possible tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Based on data in this study, the second documented news about a mosque open day appeared in California in 2002 ([Islamic shura Council 2022](#)), after the one in Australia. This was followed by numerous New York mosques that had mosque open days in 2003. Cologne Central Mosque had its the first mosque open day appear on social media in 2004 in Germany. Mosque open days spread worldwide over the next decade, including in the US, UK, Japan, Germany, France, India, Hong Kong, South Africa, and Sri Lanka. Almost all global media outlets such as the BBC, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox News, al-Jazeera, Asia News, and Deutsche Welle covered these events. Sites such as the New York Times, Boston Globe, The Guardian, The Age, Sydney Morning Herald, Boston Globe, Huffington Post, Hindu Times and more, also covered the mosque open days. Some organizations such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the [Dialogue Society \(2011\)](#) in the UK prepared online guides for mosque open days. The media coverage was quite positive and helpful for alleviating prejudices against Muslims. Innumerable non-Muslims and local religious leaders and dignitaries have participated in mosque open days.

In the long run, Islamic organizations in Muslim minority countries realized the significant contribution of mosque open days for building bridges with non-Muslims and promoting Islam. Interestingly, even some conservative Muslim groups such as *Jamiatul Ulama* in South Africa who may not have been happy to see non-Muslims entering a mosque without ablution, ended up organizing a mosque open day in 2019. They too felt the necessity of reaching out to their neighbors. Such projects have been developed to be family friendly. For example, the Islamic Centre of North Texas made the mosque open day a social event. There was a *henna* designer for women, face painting for children, an Islamic arts table, and a *hijab* trial area for non-Muslim women. Islamic organizations marketed the event with phrases such as "Visit my mosque", "Working together with other faiths", "Hope not hate", "Open mosque day — next door!", "A day at the mosque", and "A tour of the mosque". Muslims in the UK established a website (<https://visitmymosque.org/>) for mosque open days. Also, many traditional ethnic foods were served at mosque open days. Interestingly, some organizations in the Muslim majority countries such the University Malaysia Pahang organized mosque open days for non-Muslim citizens ([pimpin.ump.edu.my n.d.](#)). Pakistan based *Minhaj ul Quran* International, an Islamic Movement that is led by Tahir-ul-Qadri, held mosque open days all over the world in their mosques in 2007 ([Mosque Open Day 2007](#)). In 2019, Egyptian based *Quwwat ul-Islam* Society also organized mosque open days in Cairo for non-Muslim citizens ([Quwwat ul-Islam 2019](#)).

Based on an examination of information about the mosque open days on the mosques' websites, media coverage and YouTube videos, they appear to have been well prepared and professionally conducted. However, some seem poorly organized due to a lack of professionalism and resources. This study found positive feedback based on testimonials covered by the media and people on YouTube. However, measuring the contribution of

mosque open days to social harmony could be another research topic, as it is beyond the scope of this paper. Most of the open days embodied the Muslim faith through warm and welcoming hospitality rather than proselytizing. On the other hand, this research found that a small number of the open days were used as an instrument for the proselytization of the religion.

The success of mosque open days becoming a globalized phenomenon is based on several reasons. First, the war on terror created curiosity about Islam and Muslims in Western society. Second, Muslims felt compelled to reach out to the wider society due to political and social conditions in the first two decades of the 21st century. Third, telecommunications and information technology helped the spread of mosque open days faster than expected. Finally, the theological and educational background of board members of the AIS and AIF inspired them to initiate such a timely project, which was later adopted by other Hizmet affiliates and Islamic organizations throughout the world. Furthermore, the mosque open day project triggered some faith based or Islamic schools to take their students to non-Muslim places of worship in Western countries to learn about other faiths, ensuring the flow of knowledge was taking place both ways.

Based on the collected data, some marginal groups and anti-Muslim individuals harshly criticized the mosque open days. Far-right groups were suspicious about non-Muslims being educated about Islam and Muslims at mosque open days. Jihad Watch, Meforum and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Watch are a few of them. This is beyond the scope of this study.

*Tajdid* is a renewal, not reform. It is not inventing something new that has no foundation in the religion but reasserting a neglected or forgotten Islamic tradition. *Mujaddid* is 'ibn zaman' the son of his time who digests the knowledge for renewal and presents it according to the needs of the time. Inspired by Nursi's renewal philosophy, the Hizmet Movement reasserted Islam through the embodiment of the faith and institutionalized it in a religious, social and educational context in secular Turkey. Hizmet has also become globally influential to a certain extent. While most Islamic movements have engaged in Sharia, Islamic schools, Qur'an courses, and mosques, the Hizmet Movement has opened private educational and health institutions and humanitarian aid organizations without labelling them as Islamic. Instead of proselytization, the Hizmet affiliates embodied their faith. Mosque open days can be considered *tajdid khass* (a specific renewal) that has contributed to striving against misconceptions about Islam and prejudices towards Muslims in the West.

## 8. Conclusions

Historically, all *mujaddids* theorized the principles of *tajdid*. Their students and followers of the students took these principles and applied them in their spiritual and social lives through *tamsil* or role modelling. The mosque open days as the *tajdid*, began with baby steps in Melbourne and Sydney in 2001, before the 9/11 terrorist attacks but later became a common practice in Australia and worldwide. Nursi theorized the renewal in the early 20th century regarding Christian-Muslim relations. Under the spiritual leadership of Fethullah Gülen, the Hizmet Movement developed it further and put it into practice in many countries. The mosque open days are one example. To overcome prejudices and mistrust, Islamic organizations saw the social benefit of mosque open days and have globalized them. This study found that the initiative of AIS in Sunshine Mosque and AIF in Gallipoli Mosques before September 11, 2001, gradually influenced Islamic organizations to organize mosque open days in Australia.

The followers of Said Nursi's students believed in the social and spiritual benefits of his principles of Christian-Muslim relations and applied them when opportunities arose. When the AIS and AIF board members and volunteers initiated the mosque open day project first in Melbourne and then in Sydney, before the September 11 terrorist attacks, they would not have imagined that it would be applied nationwide and then globally. They faced great challenges. Some Muslims accused them of watering down Islam or creating an

ecumenical new religion, but they did not quit. The political and social conditions of the world that were created by the war on terror at that time, compelled them to initiate such an initiative.

Historically, mosques were visited by individuals or small groups out of curiosity or to learn about Islam and Muslims. Some groups or schools visited for excursions. Based on data collected online and to my knowledge, as an active and connected member of the Muslim community, there were no organized mosque open days in Australia before 2001. It is possible that there could be some unrecorded mosque open day attempts in the world previously. However, they might not have found an environment and sufficient support to grow.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For the detail of Nursi's renewal philosophy see Muslim World special issue on Said Nursi, issue 82 no  $\frac{3}{4}$ , 1999 and Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, Vol 19, issue 1 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> Fethullah Gülen is “one of the most influential Muslim scholars in the world. His philosophy of combining Islam and modernity, together with religious tolerance, has attracted millions of followers who have established hundreds of educational and cultural institutions all over the world. Influenced by Sufi masters and contemporary Turkish Muslim scholar, Said Nursi, Gülen puts spirituality in the centre of everything. While he is a prominent advocate of interreligious dialogue and an admired religious leader, he has been accused by some secularists of being a fundamentalist with a hidden agenda to apply Shariah law to Turkey and religious fundamentalists for compromising religion. Gülen rejects these claims pointing to his past and current activities” (Yucel 2010a, p. 1). The current political Islamist government of Turkey accused him of being the mastermind behind the failed military coup on July 15, 2016. Gülen persistently rejected this accusation.
- <sup>3</sup> For the detail of his renewal philosophy see Muslim World (special issue on Fethullah Gulen) V 93, issue 3, 2005.

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