

Teaching Religion in a Secular Society

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1. The Study of Religion in the Classical Period of Islam

Religion has been a social reality since the earliest known history of human societies. It is an undeniable fact that man acquires everything in order to survive in this world from the society, in which he is born, raised in and lives his life. The needs for his survival do not only consist of material necessities; he also needs some metaphysical supports. The mechanisms that help man to endure in this world are generally called religions. In fact, systems of values and beliefs are the major component of a society's culture. Belief systems overlap significantly with the other aspects of culture, for example, these systems may affect the cultural significance of rain, or even a recreational pursuit like playing polo. Religions affect virtually every learned behaviour; therefore, they enjoy a central part of the larger cultural systems in which they exist.

Since people learn culture, civilisations throughout history and geographical areas generated their own institutions of learning. There may of course exist some similarities and differences among such institutions because of local traditions, customs, and people's daily needs, all of which might have required a specific discipline in order to solve their everyday problems such as fiqh (Islamic law), or tasavvuf (Sufism). In the case of the various Islamic societies, the term madhab, which could be translated as "school", in fact referred to "sect" or "rite" of the people who followed a specific teaching. As in the world of Christianity in the Middle Ages, religion played a very important role in the world of Islam as well. The role of the Islamic religion has been so central in the lives of ordinary Muslims that learning a science for them usually meant learning the tenets and rituals of their religion. Unlike Western legal systems, the shari'ah (the codification of God's law) does not differentiate between religious and social matters, and it concerns itself with every aspect of social, political, economic and cultural lives of its followers.

The idea of studying religion scientifically apart from philosophy, and especially apart from theology, became widespread in the West with F. Max Müller's pioneering Buddhism studies (1880) in the second half of the 19th century. However, this did not mean that in the West there was no interest in religion and religious phenomena previously. In fact, religion had been one of the prime subjects that had occupied the minds of Western men since the ancient Greeks and many ideas and arguments had been produced about religious phenomena since then. Despite the fact that the investigation of the phenomenon of religion from historical, sociological, psychological, and phenomenological perspective and comparative religious researches appeared very late, humankind could not stay away from this innate phenomenon since its beginning.

Thinking about religion and making interpretations of it, as well as of religious events, started in the Islamic world already during the revelation of the Qur'an. First of all, the Qur'an makes it very clear that there is not just one religion; there are religions. Therefore, the Qur'an makes a distinction between the Muslims and others in general; for example, "Thou shalt not find any people who believe in God and the Last Day who are loving to anyone who opposes God and His Messenger, not though they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers, or their clan" (58:22). Even during this initial period of Islam, there appeared works evaluating the terms religion (al-din) and the (real) religion (ad-din al-hakk) in addition to works about the religions of people of the book. The word used in Arabic for religion is din, "obviously related to the Hebrew and Aramaic word meaning law. In both Judaism and Islam, religion and law, though not identical, largely overlap" (Lewis, 1984:12). Of course, Islam is a din among other dins but it needed to define itself as different from others. It did so by differentiating its believers from the followers of other religions. Islam is defined in the Qur'an "against Christianity by verses rejecting the incarnation and the trinity, against Judaism by passages abandoning some of the Jewish dietary laws. Far more important than the rejection of Christianity and Judaism, however, was the rejection of paganism – the main enemy against which the Prophet fought and from which he won the main body of his converts" (ibid.). As a result of this overall rejection of paganism the Qur'an gave a superior position to Christianity and Judaism as against idol-worshippers. Therefore, according to the Qur'an at least three kinds of religions in the world: Islam, the religion per se, other revealed religions, and paganism. This three-partite classification is obvious in the Qur'anic verse as the pagans are excluded

from the mercy of God: “Those who believe [i.e., the Muslims], and those who profess Judaism, and the Christians and the Sabeans, those who believe in God and the Last Day and act righteously, shall have their reward with their Lord; there shall be no fear in them, neither shall they grieve” (2:62). It is perfectly reasonable that the Muslims should inquire about the categories of religions mentioned in the Qur’an.

The most important reason why works about religious subject matter and other religions came into being at an early stage is the Qur’an, the holy book of Islam, which offered reflections on the term “religion” and on its fundamental characteristics. Secondly, the abundant information on the prevailing religions of other peoples who were living at the time in the Arabian peninsula contributed in a great deal as well. In several places, the Qur’an mentions the Jews and Christians in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as the Sabeans¹ and Magians² who lived nearby. It also speaks about the pagan religion of Mecca and the religion of Hunafa’ (pl. of Hanif, monotheists). These were the Arabic-speaking monotheist people, living in that area, who believed in one God with the concept of many lesser gods that included his daughters, Allat (the goddess), Manat, and Uzzah³. The Muslims made researches about the members of the religions that they encountered in their everyday lives and debated with them according to the information that the Qur’an had offered them. However, these researches were confined to the religions mentioned in the Qur’an, only.

Later on, as a result of the expansion through conquests, the Muslims encountered many religions other than their own. In the new circumstances, in which they had to live together with adherents to other faiths, they felt obliged embark on new researches about these religions. The works of the Muslims on other religions were generally of the nature of responding the criticisms coming from these religions and trying to show the superiority of Islam. At other times, these works stressed incoherencies in and invalidity of these religions. Therefore, almost all of them were written in an apologetic nature. The works of Raddiya (Refutation, polemics) are the best examples of this genre. Thus, Raddiyas against Christians⁴, Jews, Magians, Dualists, and pagans came into being.

The best example of these works is the book of the Andalusian scholar Abu Muhammad Ali b. Ahmed Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1063) entitled *Kitab al-fasl fi’l-milal wa al-ahwa’ wa al-nihal* (Book on the other religions and sects and denominations within them). This book contains some critical evaluations of the Jewish and Christian sacred texts. In addition to the *al-Fasl of Ibn Hazm*, there were other scholarly and more objective works, such as Muhammad b. Abd al-Karim al-Shahristani’s (d.547/1153) *al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (Beirut: Dar al-Maarifa, 1961; *Book of Religions and Sects*)⁵ and Abu al-Raihan Muhammad b. Ahmed al-Biruni’s (d. 478/1048) famous work known as

¹ The Qur’an mentions quite favourably a group known as the Sabeans, who were by the second century identified with various star-worshipping but still vaguely monotheistic sects in Mesopotamia. The Sabeans are tolerated in Islamic law, although they are less privileged than the Jews and Christians, a position reflected in the ruling in Shari’a that a Muslim may not marry their women or eat their meat.

² The Magian (the name is taken from the wise men or wonder-workers of the Middle East, the magi) is a person who believes there is one God (Ahura Mazda “the Knowing Lord”) whose Good Spirit is constantly opposed to the spirit of evil. This belief is also known as Zoroastrianism, which encompassed geographically the Persian plateau, the Arabian peninsula, the fertile crescent down into Egypt and well up into the Anatolian peninsula where East meets West. The rise of the religions--the Judaic, the Christian, and the Islamic--were in the Magian environment with its down to earth views of a contained sky vault or firmament. Heaven as an actual place somewhere in the universe, could even be transposed as a paradise garden such as Eden in an arid landscape on earth.

³ During the later period in Mecca, and above all, in Medina, the word 'hanif' is usually employed in reference to Abraham, where the Qur’an’s author emphasizes the point that, 'Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a 'Hanif', a Muslim, one who did not belong to the idol-worshippers.'(3:60, 2:129). Since Abraham is thus represented as a 'Hanif', but was neither a Jew nor a Christian, Muhammad must have viewed him (as he did not have the Torah nor Gospel) as a man who had followed the above mentioned God-given disposition, and had cut himself free of the worship of idols. The Christians and Jews therefore, had no right to claim Abraham as their own, as he acted according to natural instinct, requiring neither the Torah nor Gospel to submit himself truly to God. 'Hanif' thus means for Muhammad, as indicated (in the majority of uses) one who is not of the idol-worshippers, yet is neither a Jew nor a Christian, attaching himself to one of these religious communities.

⁴ As an example of a detailed study on the polemics written by Muslims against Christianity please see Aydın 1989.

⁵ This work was translated into English -I believe with a wrong title- as *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, (tr. by A. Z. Kazi and J. G. Flynn, London: Kegan Paul International, 1984)

Tahqiq-i Hindi¹. The former work was devoted to the comparative study of religions in general while the latter had a specific religion namely, Hinduism as its subject matter. In the introduction of this book al-Biruni complains that “while the Muslims had been able to produce fairly objective works on such religions as Judaism and Christianity, they had been unable to do so with regard to Hinduism and that, therefore he was going to attempt the task” (Rahman 1979:4).

The Muslim authors dealing with religions and religious phenomena generally adopted the classification and the fundamental concepts of the Qur’an and then they considered other religions according to these terms. The Qur’an first of all defines the purpose of creation as belief in Allah and living a life in this world according to His will; it then classifies humankind into two groups in accordance with their willingness to accept this responsibility: as believers and non-believers. The terms Mu’min (believer) or Muslim (a person who surrenders to the will of God) are used to describe those who had accepted the message of the Qur’an and the term Kafir is used for those who did not obey the religion of Islam. The groups that are defined as Kafirs and who remain outside the religion of Islam are further divided into several sub-groups such as Jews and Christians who make up the ahl al-kitab (people of the book), pagans, Magians, and Sabians (their status is a little ambiguous since, they were also reckoned among the ahl al-kitab by some scholars).

According to the accepted dogma of Islam, all religions that were revealed to the prophets are the same in essence and all have the same divine origin. This religion, which was sent by Allah through His prophets to mankind, is called the (real) Religion (ad-Din al-Hakk) or the religion of Allah; the last version of this religion which was revealed to the prophet Muhammad is again called as Islam and it is accepted that the religion which was propagated by other prophets earlier is the same as Islam. The Muslims who considered religion from this point of view regarded religions other than Islam as false and corrupted. Their evaluations of them were mainly based on this understanding. Their religious investigations in earlier times in general adopted this view and consequently these religions, which were regarded as false or corrupt, were criticised. In the meantime, however, there were many other works on the essence and necessity of religion and other religions in an impartial and scientific way. Philosophy of Religion, which constitutes an essential part of the Sciences of Religion, was also dealt with intense care under the disciplines of Kalam (Theology) and Sufism.

2. The place of the discipline of History of Religions in the educational institutions throughout Turkish history

¹ *Tahqiq ma li al-Hind min ma’kula makhbula fi al-akl aw marzula*, (Hyderabad: Daira al-Maarif al-Nizamiyya, 1958). This book was translated into English and edited by Edward C. Sachau as *Alberuni’s India*, (Delhi: Chand & Co., 1964), for an excellent evaluation of the work of al-Biruni please see; Arvind 1991, Embree 1971, and Lawrence 1976.

During the formation and progressive periods of the Ottoman state the discipline of the History of Religions was not to be found in the curricula of the madrasas (schools), of course, as these institutions were the basic and perhaps the most advanced teaching organisations throughout the Empire, there is no need to mention the fact that in other parts of the country or schools the subject was not taught. The works on the History of Religions that came into being in 19th-century Europe had a considerable effect in the Ottoman state and consequently the program of the Darulfunun Edebiyat Fakültesi (Istanbul University, Faculty of Literature) contained a class of Tarih-i Umumi ve Ilm-i Esatiri'l-Evvelin (lit., General History and Science of the Religions of Earlier Peoples, "Mythology") in 1874.

There were some attempts, especially during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839), to reform the education system of the country after the Western style. After the death of Mahmud II his son Abdülmecid (1823-1861) became the sultan. He was a modernist sultan and gave importance to education as well. He demanded to be brought some brilliant students from all over the country to the Darul Maarif (a high quality private school that was established in order to prepare students for the Darulfunun) in Istanbul. These students, upon their completion of their studies were also sent to Paris to carry out their education. Reshid Pasha (1800-1858), for example, was his grand vizier who had a great impact on him about the Westernisation of the country. Ali Pasha (1815-1871) was also another grand vizier during the reigns of Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz. Like Reshid Pasha he was also sent to several European countries as an ambassador. This post enabled him to compare the education systems of these countries and the Ottoman one. He was also of the opinion that the children of the religious minorities should be mixed with Muslim students in the schools lest Greek and Bulgarian subjects have hostile feelings towards Turks. Since the education of the Greeks children in Greece and the education of the Bulgarian pupils in Russia would make them see the Turks as their enemies, naturally, such activities should be avoided; as a result, he suggested to open a new school (the Galatasaray Sultanisi – Galatasaray High School) for these children (Akyüz 1985:165-66).

Although the decision was made in 1846 to set up a Darulfunun, the opening of this university was as late as 1863. According to the 1863 Act of Maarifi-i Umumiyye (general education) the university was to have three departments, namely, Hikmet ve Edebiyat (Philosophy and Literature), Ilm-i Hukuk (Science of Law) and Ulum-i Tabiiyye ve Riyaziyye (Natural and Mathematical Sciences). After the proclamation of the Second Parliamentary Monarchy (1908), there was a course unit of Tarih-i Din-i Islam ve Tarih-i Edyan (History of Islam and History of Religions) at the Faculty of Theology in 1911.

The madrasas of Istanbul were brought together under a new institution of Daru'l-Hilafetu'l-Aliyye in accord with the Act of Islah-i Medaris (Reformation of the Schools, 2 September 1914; Akyüz, 1985:263) and the Faculty of Theology was restructured as the Madrasatu'l-Mutehassisin (School of Experts) and at its department of Kalam, Sufism, Philosophy, and a course of Tarih-i Edyan ve Mezahib (History of Religions and Sects) were taught. Again, according to the Act of October 1917, the Madrasatu'l-Mutehassisin was transformed into Madrasa-i Suleymaniyye (School of Suleiman) as a superior institution above the Daru'l-Hilafetu'l-Aliyye and at the Department of Philosophy and Theology (Hikmet ve Kelam) the course of Tarih-i Edyan ve Din-i Islam (History of Religions and Islamic Religion) was taught.

In the Republic era, that is, after 1923 under the effects of the 1924 Act of Unification of Instruction (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) Madrasa-i Suleymaniyye took the name of İlahiyat Fakültesi (Faculty of Divinity) and at this department the courses of Felsefe-i Din (Philosophy of Religion), Türk Tarih-i Dinisi (History of Turkish Religion) and Tarih-i Edyan (History of Religions) became available.

The Faculty of Theology was closed down in 1933 and a new institution was opened the same year; at the Institute of Islamic Research (Islam Tedkikleri Enstitüsü) two courses were taught: Türk Dinleri ve Mezhepleri Tarihi (History of Turkish Religions and Sects) and Umumi Dinler Tarihi (General History of Religions).

Three years later, in 1936 the Institute of Islamic Research was abolished and in 1949 the Faculty of Divinity was opened in Ankara. At this faculty, at the Higher Institutes of Islam (Yüksek İslam Enstitüsü), which was opened after 1959, and at the high schools of Imam Hatip (Imam-Preacher), which provided students for the higher education, there existed courses of History of Religions.

In contemporary Turkey at the faculties of theology and imam-hatip high schools, History of Religions is taught. It was Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912) who taught the course of History of Religions for the first time at the Department of Sciences of Sharia in the Daru'l-Funun-i Osmani (Ottoman University). He also wrote a book entitled Tarih-i Edyan (History of Religions, Daru'l-Hilafe, 1328/1911).

There was, of course, some information on the history of prophets and religious history in the history books (like the books of Kisas-i Enbiya - Stories of Prophets), nonetheless; the work of Ahmed Midhat Efendi (Mudafaya Mukabele ve Mukabeleye Mudafa, [Replication to Defence and Defence against Replication], İstanbul: Tercüman-ı

¹ For a detailed history of the University, please see Ayni 1995.

Hakikat, 1883) was very different in terms of the subjects it dealt. In it, Ahmed Midhat Efendi stresses the importance of religious geography and he explains the significance of religion and theories of history of religion. He also investigates religions of Mongolia, America, Egypt, Greece, Germany, China, Japan, Iran and India. If this book is examined thoroughly, it would be obvious that Ahmed Midhat Efendi follows closely the book *Manuel d'Histoire des Religions* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1904) of Chastepie de la Saussaye.

After Ahmed Midhat Efendi there were some other authors who wrote books on history of religions, such as Mahmud Esad Seydiselri (*Tarih-i Edyan*, Istanbul, 1912) and M. Şemseddin Gunaltay (*Tarih-i Edyan*, Istanbul, 1919).

The book of M. Şemseddin Gunaltay deals with subjects such as the Science of Religion, History of Religions, Philosophy of Religions, the origin of the Science of Religion, its historical developments and its current situation in the Islamic world, the essence and classification of religion, the origin of the concept of religion, primitive religions and finally, Chinese and Japanese religions.

Georges Dumézil taught the classes of *Tarih-i Edyan* at the Faculty of Divinity between the years 1924 and 1927. In the next six years (1927-1933) Hilmi Omer Budda gave these classes there. It was Fuat Koprulu who gave the classes of *Türk Tarih-i Dinisi* (*History of Turkish Religion*; Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1985) and Mehmet Emin taught Philosophy of Religion at the same faculty.

At the Institute of Islamic Research which was run between the years 1933 and 1936 Omer Hilmi Budda gave these classes. Hilmi Omer Budda published his book entitled *Dinler Tarihi* (*History of Religions*) in 1935. This work dealt only with the religions of India, China, and Japan, and the section on Buddhism extensively relied on Hermann Oldenberg's book *Die Lehre der Upanishaden und die Anfänge des Buddhismus*¹.

After a blank period, that is, the prohibition of religious teaching in Turkish Republic between the years 1936 and 1949, Omer Hilmi Budda taught History of Religions in the Faculty of Divinity until 1952, which was opened in Ankara again in 1949. In the next two years Mehmet Karasan gave these classes and from 1954 to 1959 they were given by Annemarie Schimmel (*Dinler Tarihine Giriş*, [Introduction to History of Religions]). After 1959 they were given by Kemal Balkan and the teacher of many contemporary lecturers of History of Religions in Turkey, Hikmet Tanyu.

There are 22 faculties of theology in modern Turkey and the experts of this discipline give the classes of History of Religions. The researches that have been made in Turkey so far, have been mainly pursued in the following fields:

- 1- The works of the Muslims (such as Ibn Hazm, Makdisi, Abu al-Meali, Razi, etc.) on History of Religions (for example, Belenköylü 1991 and Gürbüzler 1990);
- 2- Investigations into some specific phenomena in certain religions (for example, the institution of Sabbath and the belief in the Afterlife in Christianity, see Gürkan 1994, Paçacı 1989 and Atasagun 1989);
- 3- A comparative investigation of a phenomenon in various religions (for example, Adam, repentance, grace, angel, pilgrimage, etc. in divine religions; see Adam 1989, Cenan 1994, Yüce 1975 and Erbaş 1992);
- 4- Works on sects or denominations (for example, Unitarianism, Church of Chalcedony or Suryanism (Syrian Orthodox Church), etc.; see Çelik 1985, Albayrak 1995 and Bilge 1990);
- 5- The ancient tribes that were mentioned in the Qur'an like Ad and Sodom (for example, Yıldız 1989);
- 6- Works on the refutations of other religions (for example the Refutation of Tabari against Christianity; see Coşar 1985 and Güler 1989);
- 7- The religions of minorities in modern Turkey (for example, the Jews of Istanbul or the Protestant churches in Istanbul; see Alkoç 1997 and Lekesiz 1983);
- 8- Interreligious relationships (such as the theme of dialogue and the relations between Islam and Judaism; see Yılmaz 1995 and Ceran 1992);
- 9- Certain religions or religious concepts from an Islamic point of view (for example, Jesus, Moses or Judaism; see Akdemir 1992, İlbay 1990, Kutluay 1964 and Tezokur 1992);
- 10- Works on the sacred texts of other religions (for example, Vedas, Torah, Bible, etc.; see Demirci 1988);
- 11- Works on the Turkish world (for example, beliefs of various Turkish tribes, etc.; see Albayrak, Ali 1995 and Özdemir 1977).

As can be seen from the above-mentioned works contemporary researches on History of Religions in Turkey have the following objectives:

¹ This book has recently been translated into English by Shrotti (1991).

- a- They aim at unearthing the cultural heritage and its evaluation.
- b- Some works have a specific purpose of understanding various religious groups.
- c- There are also other works that try to give accurate information about other religions to the Turkish public in a world that becomes smaller every day.
- d- Some other studies try to define the nature of interreligious relations throughout history.

In sum, all these attempts should be considered in the light of the significance of religion in future. It should also be mentioned that there are other researches and investigations in the subfields of religious sciences such as Sociology of Religion and Psychology of Religion. These works have become increasingly sophisticated since the 1950s. Ziya Gokalp, a follower and a representative of the school of Emile Durkheim in Turkey made the first studies in sociology. Gokalp, at the beginning, believed that Islam would have a positive effect on the progress of the Muslim societies and it would help these societies to adopt modern institutions (cf. Gokalp 1917). However, he changed this attitude on religion and its functions in society later and in the end religion became just one of the elements of social life and culture. Religion, according to him, was now reduced into some rituals and activities of religious groups or at most, it is one of many other institutions of social life. Gokalp, like Durkheim before him, distinguishes between two sets of phenomena; sacred and profane. For him, there are two kinds of rituals in Islam, namely, negative rituals and positive rituals. Negative rituals are individualistic rituals such as fasting, almsgiving (zakah), avoiding gossip and praying alone. The aim of these rituals are making the individual a good citizen, who loves his/her country (yurtsever). If these rituals are performed publicly, like praying the Jum'a (Friday) prayer or pilgrimage, then, these rituals would become reference points for the harmony in society (Gokalp 1917b). The ideas and beliefs of Ziya Gokalp played a very important role in the formation of the Republic and the consequent revolutions as modernisation was understood in terms of modernisation in religion. In other words, the attempts to create a new Turkish identity -independent of Ottoman or Muslim identities- were mainly based on the assumption that if and when religious knowledge is transformed from Arabic to Turkish then Turkish nation would be freed from the ummah (an entity that assumes all the Muslims in the world are just one nation). Apart from the fact that Ziya Gokalp was the most important figure in Turkish sociology, the reason why he was so influential in Turkish politics could be explained by his personal relationships with the current political figures. As that circle of friends came to power his ideas gained a source of legislation.

Later, the researches in this field took Turkish history and Islam as their subjects, especially under the supervision of and guidance of the works by H. Ziya Ulken (1979) and Sabri Ulgener (1981). The writings of Mumtaz Turhan (1951) and Nurettin Topçu (1970) in the 1950s are especially noteworthy. M. Turhan investigates social changes in the social life, the fundamental problems of the system of education and the question of Westernisation in both theoretical and practical levels; while N. Topçu stresses the function and role of religion in a changing social structure. Ali Fuat Basgil (1962) and Osman Turan (1964) wrote about the relationship between religion and state which is a hot topic of discussion since the beginning of the Republic. The works of Serif Mardin (1969) and Niyazi Berkes (1973) investigate the socio-cultural structure of modern Turkey, specifically trying to define its religio-social and historical background in the light of the concept of modernisation.

The studies in the field of the psychology of religion, have a relatively recent past. Bedii Ziya Egemen (1952 and 1965) was the first academic who did some researches in this field in Turkey. Since it is a new discipline most of the work in psychology of religion are concentrated on the developmental psychology.

3. Some Considerations and Comments on the Teaching of Religion in the Republican Era

The Turkish Republic, which was founded on Ottoman soil, defined its ultimate purpose as reaching the same level of contemporary civilisation; in other words, when the Ottomans felt humiliated against their Western opponents in almost every field from military to politics, they decided to make their country modernised. In order to reach this very well-defined objective it was stressed that the society should be Westernised immediately. One of the elements of Westernisation was that religion, as in the Western society should be excluded from public and political life altogether. For the supporters of such a belief, religion should be understood as exclusively an individual relationship between man and God. Therefore, first of all the institution of Khalifate was disestablished on 3 March 1924 and with two new bills the state ministries of Sharia and foundations (Şer'iyye ve Evkaf Nezareti) were abolished. The Religious Affairs and Foundations were not ministries any more, but began to be administered by two presidencies under the prime minister. All matters related to education were monopolised by the state and the madrasas were closed down. The religious courts were abolished. All of these developments were the first steps of secularisation in the country.

The tekkes (religious lodges) and similar institutions were also abolished. Religious dress was prohibited in 1925. In the next year, the Swiss Civil Code became the civil code of Turkey. This movement reflected a wholly secular world-view. The second article of the Constitution, which proclaimed “the religion of the state is Islam”, was abolished in 10 April 1928. The principle of secularisation was inserted into the Constitution in 1937.

As Serif Mardin points out Atatürk took the movement of Westernisation under his patronage since he associated it with the contemporary civilisation. In other words, he just continued to execute existing attempts towards Westernisation (Mardin 1956). Although we are against the generalisations as they make the social reality appear to be analysed in simple terms but in order to elaborate our argument about the transformation of the Turkish society from Ottoman to Turkish Republic we feel compelled to resort to some generalisations. Simply, Islam was the main reference point in regulating the Ottoman society. Daily life was interpreted through the Islamic framework. The Ottomans believed that their world supremacy proved that the religion of the state was right and there was no reason why this belief system should not continue as it was. However, when the Ottoman state fell behind the Western powers in the 19th century, the officials of the state felt to imitate the West, either through a reformation or changing the status of their religion in the society. In fact, with the change in the superior status of the Ottoman state the social relations had changed as well. There was no harmony between religious life and profane life; as a result which the country was occupied by the positivist sciences and ideas.

Religion in the Islamic civilisation represents the ultimate organisational factor; that is, it is the most important force to regulate daily life. Therefore, it is understandable that teaching or learning religion is an indispensable part of a Muslim’s life. In the theocratic regimes religion was taught all students in the general curricula of schools but if and when a regime becomes more secular, then religion becomes just another subject among many other classes taught in the school. That is the reason why we are proposing a distinction between religious teaching and teaching religion. As in the case of Turkey, the transformation of the country from a more religious regime to a secular one, had an enormous effect on the teaching of religion. In the Republican era, with the attempts of Westernisation, which usually means secularisation, religious teaching had lost its importance, and even from time to time it was abolished altogether. Later attempts to restore religious education could not go further than to place a unit of “Religious Culture and Knowledge of Morality – Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi” in state schools’ curriculum.

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