

INSTITUTIONS OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTIONS AND PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to define historical and constitutional background of Religious Instruction in Turkey. It also gives some information on current religious instructions. After 1980 it is called as Faculty of Divinity, which provides teachers for religious instructions and employee for religious affairs to the society as an institution. In this article I put forward some problems of the religious instruction and education. So, goal of this paper is to understand and interpret the importance of religious education within a Laic State by a original approach, which is growing by its own authentic dynamics.

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Turkey has experienced some critical revolutions during its transition from Ottoman Era to Republic. According to Bilgin [5] the most difficult aspect of this revolution was the replacement of prevailing laws (*sharia*). This brought equality between Muslim and non-Muslims; the equality of women with men before the law; monogamy; the necessity of divorce before a judge, etc. It is thought that digestion of these changes is still very much in operation within the country [5, p-67].

According to some scholars educational system had triad characteristics, which includes former schools - *Madrasahs*, schools of *Tanzimat era* – and schools for foreigners who live in Turkey in the last era for Ottoman State before Law of the Unification of Instructions [3, p-6]. The other scholars outline the main elements of dual system before this Law as religious (*Madrasah*) and laic (schools) [5, p-23; 10, p-27; 12. p-23].

In a meeting Atatürk, who was a leader for the new state of Turkey, had said ‘*we haven’t have a class of clergy, all of us have to learn our rules of our religion as equally. Of course everyone needs a place /an institution where s/he learns his/her religion, religiosity and faith. This place is a school.*’ [1, p-98]

The last affected change of the model of relationship between religious institutions and state in the Turkey took place in 1923 by the constructed proclaiming of Republic of Turkey. To clarify position of religion in schools, from the beginning of the established of the Republic of Turkey

it was decided:

1. To do religious instructions in schools, not in the other institutions.
2. To continue Religious Education under the control and supervision of the state within formal educational system for all children.
3. To construct Imam-Hatip Schools (school for imam and preacher) for requirements of religious duties and services as belong to the Ministry of Education.
4. To establish a theology or divinity faculty for higher degrees in religious instructions, this will belong to the University.

From this perspective of changing of religious institutions the date of 1924 is a clear separation point by proclaiming the **Law of Unification of Instructions** (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat-Öğretimin Birliği Kanunu*) in March 3, 1924. This law was proclaiming that all kind of schools had to unify, which were applying different curricula and methods.

By proclamation of the **Law of Unification of Instructions** a new Faculty of Divinity has been established within the *Darülfünun*, a unique university system, which assumed modern education methods. Of course *Madrasah* at the beginning of the Ottoman age existed, in spite of all its controversial history it was effective institution to the date of 1924. As is known history of *madrasah* has an arguable historic background from the openness of the changing. But it has also a special and authentic style for the Selçuklu and Ottoman citizens as divergent from the Arabic style with the

methods and curricula. For additional knowledge see Baltacı [4]. During the same time Religious Instructions had continued in schools besides this *Imam Hatip* schools had also begun to train Imam and preacher.

The period between 1930 and 1949 was politically and constitutionally quite turbulent related to the religious affairs. In 1933, theology Faculty was closed when Dar'ul-funun was converted into the Istanbul University. In 1930's religious education courses were taken out from the school program up to 1949.

The first Divinity Faculty in Turkey was established within Ankara University on June 4 1949. In 1951, *Imam-Hatip* Schools were also established within the system of the secondary schools. The current situation and constitution have gradually developed from 1980 onwards [2, p-31].

DEVELOPING RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AREA AFTER 1980

Developments and changes of all over the world have changed the social demands in the all area in Turkey in 1980's. Religious Education applications in Turkey have been discussed on following perspectives.

- Is this practice successful or not?
- Are the achievements of religious education enough to cover new religious requirements in public? Is the methods and approach of Religious Education is convenient for minority groups?

Besides all these questions some intellectuals are arguing the question:

Should religious instructions take part in the school curricula by the reason of the Laic understanding and interpretations?

After the army revolution of September 12, 1980 this discussion had started intensively and continued to the September 18, 1982 when it was legislated in the Constitution as follows:

Article of 24: Constitution of the Republic of Turkey is related with the *Freedom of Religion and Conscience* and religious education and its instructions are determined such as education and instruction in religion ethics shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instructions shall be subject to the individual's own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives.'

We can say that Religious and Moral Education and its instructions are done under control and supervision of the

state. Religious culture and knowledge of ethics instructions be included in the compulsory courses in the primary and secondary schools. Beyond this religious education and its instruction for adults barely depends on the person's own demands and for children depending on the demands of the legal representative of them.

Divinity Schools in Turkey

It has been mentioned that the first Faculty of Divinity in the Turkish Republic was established in Ankara in 1949. In time, this faculty grew and became a respected institution, and it provided teaching faculty consisted of its own graduates, and its graduates also received academic teaching positions in other Divinity Schools, which were established after the establishment of Faculty of Divinity at Ankara University. In 1971, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Istanbul Higher Islamic Institute was instituted by Ministry of National Education in 1959. Following it other similar institutes were established in Konya , Kayseri, Izmir, Erzurum, Bursa, Samsun, and Yozgat. By the Law of Higher Educational Council (YOK), in 1982, these institutes were made as parts of universities, which were located in the same cities, as the respective Faculties of Divinity. New Divinity Schools continued to be established under the administration of various universities. Currently, in Turkey 22 Faculties of Divinity provide higher Religious Education and Instructions.

In recent years, among the 22 Faculties of Divinity, Marmara University - Faculty of Divinity, Ankara University - Faculty of Divinity, İzmir Dokuz Eylül University - Faculty of Divinity, and Konya Selçuk University - Faculty of Divinity are fulfilling an important role of Religious Education in Turkey. These are servicing the faculties for producing teachers for religious culture and knowledge of ethics instructions in Schools. And these are carrying out the function of training of elements for religious services and affairs. In addition to this the institutions are giving service of a research center. For instance Marmara University Faculty of Divinity has a rich library which has a collection of approximately 13,000 books, 2,716 thesis, 1,080 handwritten manuscripts, 1,232 Journals totally 68,200 volumes. All of the bibliographic definitions of the publications are restricted on computers and all information is cited to internet.

Programs and Aims at Faculty of Divinities

Faculty of Divinity undergraduate program is designed to produce qualified graduates, who take Qur'an and Sunnah as their ultimate basis, who are able to evaluate the cultural heritage they inherit, to interpret the present life conditions, and to propose solutions to current religious problems.

The divinity undergraduate program has three

departments with various major scientific areas:

1. Department of Basic Islamic Sciences.
2. Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies.
3. Department of Islamic History and Islamic Arts.

With Major scientific areas this departments provide students with information about features, curriculum, methods, historical development, psychological, sociological, and philosophical foundations of religious education. Students are instructed on various issues concerning Islamic History, such as institution of Islamic historiography, sources of Islam, the periods of the Prophet Mohammed, and Turkish-Muslim states their institutions, culture and civilization. In this program with courses of history, religions, relations among religions, their similarities and differences are considered with comparative methods. Such courses aim for furthering knowledge concerning religions that are closely connected to Islamic and national history, such as Judaism and Christianity as well as living world religions like, Buddhism, Hinduism and great systems of belief which contributed to making of human history. Now Sikhism will also be added in the curricula. It is heard that a new department is opening in the Faculty of Divinity, Ankara University, which will include Eastern Religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism in it.

Postgraduate Education

In Turkey, postgraduate education (Master and PhD) is pursued at institutes established within universities. Postgraduate education in the area of divinity is offered within the organization of the universities, institute of social Sciences.

PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN TURKEY

Problems of informal Religious Education

As mentioned above, in the section of article of 24. *Freedom of Religion and Conscience*, of the Constitution of 1982 Religious Education and Instructions of 'Religious and Moral Education' are done under the control and supervision of the state. Despite some of its problems, religious instructions are provided in schools. But for adult persons, who demand religious knowledge, the religious instructions offered by experts and connoisseurs are not so sufficient and adequate yet.

While the expression of the Constitution 'Beyond this religious education and its instruction for adults barely depends on the person's own demands' undertake a social right for every citizen (related with article 42), there is no capable religious education means for adults. Presidency of Religious Affairs presents some services to teaching Qur'an and some Religious knowledge. For

more information about presidency of religious affairs consult <http://www.diyenet.gov.tr> [6]. For a country, which has a lot of complicated problems about religious education, after the Republican period in the process of adopting laic system understanding of religion and moral values in life practices, is required to consider people's of religious and daily needs together.

Religious and mostly cultural applying about religion still need to improve as an effective way to solution of problems between modern life and religion. Although the Turkish People have deep and strong traditional background, they are open to improvements to changing. And in some new situations, most of the people of Turkey are searching a way between traditional and modern. There are some problems which are arising from this kind of changing. But I must say that the Turkish people are satisfied with their belief and faith and their God images [9]. In other words it can be easily said that the Turkish People do not confront any difficulty to reconcile between modern and traditional form of thought.

Problems in Primary and Secondary School about Religious Education

It is the most important discussion subject of religious education in Turkey. From the point of view of confessional understanding, it cannot be said if this sort of education style is exactly confessional. This disputed title is being debated since 1982 in the framework of the subject whether religious education is educational or instructional school. However, it is decided that the preference of *Religious Instructions* are not education. But the question of 'how can some religious practice requirements and rights carried out in schools with a form of education process? And has the religious instruction concept the same effect to the children and young ones without practicing when it is compared with that of the education concept?

Another headline argument is religious instructions for different age groups who live in the same geographical area. For this necessity after 2000, a new understanding in religious education has been developed with the approaching of Intersects Religious Instructions [11].

The legal basis of Religious Education is interpreted by Özdemir [7] as follows:

What is important in this context is to achieve the aim of education as described in article 42.

1. The basic objective of Religious Education (RE) is 'education' not 'training'. While 'education' provides sound and scientific knowledge about religion, which is considered as a cultural element; and 'training' means upbringing or personality molding.
2. The RE should be objective, that is, it must be independent of any religious inclination and

indifferent to all religions, sects and non religious philosophical teachings.

3. The RE should be based on the spirit of tolerance and brotherhood. It should not encourage any activity and ideology which may threaten the social integrity, stability and peace of society [3, p-83; 7, p-83].

With regard to the justification of Religious Instruction it must be discussed when it should begin. There is no Religious Instruction or training for preschool children and for the first three years of the primary school. However, it starts at the fourth year of primary schools and continues to the end of the secondary schools. Except in the academic platforms this problem of cognitional development for learners of religious education has not been discussed as yet.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Religious Education and Religious Instructions in Turkey is quite original model. When we look into historical background of seeking Religious Instructions we understand that the Turkish people and state are experiencing a lot of conflicts and agreements. We can also find elements which are not fitting well in real situations. But most of the Turkish people still can find their own solutions to their own religious needs according to their crisis. However, the dynamics have a new expansion for some problems existing in society for

different age groups and various religious groups.

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