

ATATÜRK AND THE RELIGION OF ISLAM

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In my point of view, among Atatürk's thoughts and reforms the most frequently perverted ones of their content and the most commonly misinterpreted ones are those which concern the religion of Islam and secularism.

On one side, the materialists and the atheists who have never cared for religion at all have gone so far as to claim on purpose and without any base that Atatürk was a leader either hostile to the religion of Islam or one who simply ignored it. Such people have taken this position to hide their intentions behind Atatürk's reforms.

On the other side, some small groups who were misled by this insidious propaganda and whose interests fell into danger, worked hand in hand with those who had no accurate knowledge about secularism at all and who preferred to remain ignorant of Atatürk's thoughts and his real attitude towards the religion of Islam.

Instead, such people were expected to explore his positive and reforming approaches to religion, to evaluate them critically and to develop them.

As a result of these unfortunate developments there appeared two opposing sects concerning Atatürk and his reforms: One exploiting him, the other rejecting. In consequence, both have given harm to Atatürk and the country.

It is impossible to judge a person apart from his views and thoughts.

The full understanding of Atatürk and his principles can be acquired by exploring the main thoughts and views held and put by him.

But before examining Atatürk's thoughts about Islam we had better clarify some important points. First of all, there is a close relation between one's religious experience and his social background, i.e., environment, education etc. From this point of view, Atatürk's life gives us a notably critical material to understand him. First, he was born to Muslim parents who were considerably religious. He took his early religious training from

them, particularly from his mother who brought him up. His mother Zübeydah Khanım, sent him to the local school in a traditional way in which hymns were sung by Amen Band (Amin Alayı). Both Shinasi Efendi School and Mülkiye Junior High School where he took his primary and secondary education were educational institutions offering authorized religious instruction in that time. Later he went to military schools in Selanik and Manastır, both of which offered a good deal of religious instruction. In fact it will be satisfactory to remember here that he has studied critically, *the History of Islam* by Ceatani and *the History of Islamic Civilization* by Georgi Zaidan. These books speak to the specialists of the field. His perception of the field was so deep that he authored the chapter in "Islamic History" himself when he wanted history books for high schools prepared. In addition, he knew Arabic Language well enough to understand and interpret *the Holy Koran*¹. As it is clear by now, Atatürk's religious knowledge was considerably high in its nature and level.

On the other hand, in addition to his profound knowledge about Islamic culture, one can clearly conclude on the basis of his speeches and attitudes that he was a sincere believer. Actually we find his seeking his mother's and sister's prayers prior to his departure to Samsun to start the struggle for freedom and independence of the Nation. We see him closing his address at the Ardhurum Congress with the following remark: "And finally, may Allah the Creator of all deeds help our noble nation for the sake of our most beloved and most generous prophet Mohammad. Amen."² Following the prayers at Khaji Bairam Mosque and Khaji Bairam Tomb hands were lifted up again for prayers at the opening of the Grand National Assembly. Atatürk spoke on the occasion of the formation of the first Turkish government saying: "God's help and care are with us." These words themselves demonstrate his sincere faith. His aide-de-camp Muzaffer Kılıç describes his temper at Kojatapah as follows: When our army launched its attacks at Kojatapah on August, 26, I saw him praying: "O my Lord! Let Turkish army be victorious. Do not allow Turkish Nation and Islam fall under the feet of the enemy as slaves! At the moment I saw drops of tear flowing down his cheeks." When the victory was won he sent a nation-wide report on September 1, 1922 with the title "The Great and Noble Turkish Nation" saying: "The courage and swiftness of the armies of the Great National

¹ Sadi Borak, *Atatürk ve Din*, İstanbul, 1962, pp. 6, 68-9, 72-3.

² Neda Armaner, "Atatürk ve Din", A paper read at The Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University on November, 11, 1971, p. 2.

Assembly was crowned by the help and favour of God. The future of our Nation is safe and we are sure that our armies will realize the victory promised."³ In these words he expressed his strength in his faith.

This is quite natural, for all the leaders and heroes who deserved the title "great" in the history of nations discovered the mystery of integration with the physical and spiritual values of their nations and practiced those in their own lives. And because Atatürk occupies a prominent place among those great leaders of the world who are ever known to history, no doubt that he also identified himself with all of the values of the noble Turkish Nation. As a person who was always proud of being a Turk he has also unified himself particularly with the religion which is one of the most important part of spiritual values which has become past and parcel of the Turkish nation throughout centuries and has given it a spirit and shape. Furthermore, he maintained his sincere belief in it as the highest entity in every moment of his life.

In fact when we carefully and diligently examine Atatürk's thoughts and ideas concerning religion, we do not even meet a single word or attitude in him connoting hostility or even indifference toward it. On the contrary, we find in all his words and behaviours signs of support for Islam in which he sincerely believed. Let us take his remarks at the historical session of the Great National Assembly on the October 1, 1922, for the realization of the National Sovereignty, the very words of which are as follows: *"O friends! God is one and Supreme... Allah has written that one of the prerequisites of His Divine Revelations is to involve in His servants' affairs and problems till they reach the maturity and perfection necessary even if this be actualized by means of those chosen ones. So he sent to them almost countless prophets, messengers and apostles, some known others unknown, beginning from Adam, peace be upon him. But after he has revealed the last message which consists of religious as well as secular facts he saw no need to come into direct contact with mankind anymore. Instead, he accepted that the human beings have reached the level of understanding, enlightenment and perfection to a degree that each one of his servants can get into touch with the source of Divine inspirations. And for this reason Muhammad Mustafa, peace be upon him, has become the seal of the prophets and his book is the most perfect. The last prophet Muhammad Mustafa, peace be upon him, was born on the night of 12 nd of April (Rabi'u'l-Awwal) before dawn while the horizon was just getting white... His face was luminous, his*

³ Atatürk, 1000 Temel Eser: İstanbul, 1970, pp. 162-3.

words were spiritual. He was unlike any other in his straight forwardness and keen observation, never broke his oath, tender in his attitude, above others in manliness and virtues... and with these personal and distinguished attributes peculiar to him, he had his repute as Muhammad al-Amin, the trust worthy among his tribesmen... Our master Muhammad, the object of pride for all of the world has gone to all lengths twenty years in ceaseless threats and endless hardships and incessant casualties. And after he has successfully carried out his mission of prophethood related to Islam, he transcended to the highest point of heavens."⁴

On the other hand we see him opening his famous discourse he delivered in Turkish on February 7, 1923 at Balıkcı Pasha Mosque: "O Nation! Allah is one. His fame is great. May His peace, mercy and blessings be upon you. Our excellent Master and Great Prophet has been appointed by God as a messenger to disseminate religious truth and realities and to promulgate them to human beings. And the basic laws he has preached are as you all know very well, the very facts which are taught by the Holy Kuran itself. Our religion which has poured down favor and spirit to human beings is the last and the most perfect religion; because its principles go in complete line with reason, logic and reality. If it were something against reason, logic and reality, there must have arisen a contradiction between it and the other divine and natural laws; for he who makes all the universal laws is God Himself, the Most High..."⁵

Atatürk once spoke up of a book which portrays Muhammad, peace be upon him, as an ordinary darwish in rapture: "Such ignorant people like this man could never comprehend his great genius and accomplishment. They also seem to be far from understanding this fact..."⁶, "He is Allah's unequalled and the greatest servant. Today, millions of man are following his way. My name and your name fade some day from people's mind but he abides forever (1926)".⁷

Because of his sincere belief in Islam and its prophet, as indicated above, he started an incessant campaign against those representatives of the mentality which blackens the pure and clear essence of the religion for the sake of superstitions and earthly interests - a mentality which kills the lively, creative, constructive and pioneering spirit of Islam with useless and futile talks and more important than which aims to use religion as

⁴ Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk*, İstanbul, 1961, vol. III, p. 1241.

⁵ S. Borak, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁶ Utkan Kocatürk, *Atatürk'ün Fikir ve Düşünceleri*, Ankara, 1971, p. 206.

⁷ U. Kocatürk, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

a worthless item for political and worldly profits. In fact, this behaviour of Atatürk is the natural result of his realistic approach to the objects and the outcome of his accurate knowledge about the historical past of the religion of Islam. For two hundred years, they have appeared same sort of people who preferred to cling to some tedious and fruitless repetitions as to judge Islam and religiousness of men by looking merely at their outward appearance, colour, tarboosh, length of rosary, beard and robes instead of carrying out serious and reforming studies on religion by interpreting it according to the light of the basic principles. And because such people present religion as something composed of simply meaningless outward behaviours and actions; and because they term this materialistic approach with "shari'a" these men committed sin by accusing or at least by considering those who do not believe like them as disbelievers⁸. But what was needed by the religion itself and by those masses who believe in it is to give religion its lively and active identity of its early ages and to substantialize it with authentic information and true understanding in order to make it capable of meeting the needs of modern society. I suppose that Atatürk was a man who understood this reality very deeply. His following words support this outlook:

"Religion is a necessary, unavoidable institution. Without it, nations can not survive. But to mention that religion is a matter of relationship and communication between Allah and his servant. We should not give way to those prejudiced confessors of religion nor tolerate them to lenter between god and believer. Those who misuse religion for their earthly gains are parasitical, disgusting people. We oppose such men and do not tolerate them... (1930)"⁹.

"Religion is existent and inevitable. We have a religion with sound basis. Its elements are wholesome but its structure has been neglected for centuries. Although it has fallen short of new plasters and mortars, no one felt the need to restore it. On the contrary, several foreign elements -wrong comments, superstions- put the structure into a rather worse situation and damaged it. Today we can neither touch this structure nor we can restore it. But by the time these splits and cracks got bigger and deeper, the necessity to build a fresh and new coustruction on a sound foundation will arise again..."¹⁰

⁸ Emin Işık, *Devleti Kuran İrade*, İstanbul, 1971, pp. 73 ff., 97 ff.

⁹ Kılıç Ali, *Atatürk'ün Hususiyetleri*, Ankara, 1930, p. 116.

¹⁰ U. Kocatürk, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

"Ours is the most reasonable and the most natural religion. Therefore, it has become the last religion. A natural religion must be in conformity with reasoning, science and logic. Our religion is in complete harmony with them."¹¹

"Turkish nation must be more religious than ever in the sense that it must be religious with all its purity and simplicity. I put faith in this fact as I believe in my religion and in the reality itself. Our religion does not embody any element which is contradictory to common sense and holds up progress... (1923)."¹²

"Our nation has two strong merits, namely, religion and language. No power could ever deprive it from these merits and cannot (1923)."¹³

"Although those unsound traditions of old times, were not effective, at least for a certain period of time during the golden ages of Islam, people later began to mix their old traditions and beliefs with pure religion instead of following its truthful principles and living in terms of its fundamentals. As a result of this wrong course of actions some Islamic communities, though they profess Islam as their religion, were bound today to regression, miserliness and inferiority. Because they mixed Islam with their corrupted ancestral traditions and beliefs, they have at last become alienated to the Islamic truth and were slaves of their enemies"¹⁴.

"As was the case in the past because of the existence, of some people even today both in and outside of the country who use religion as an ordinary worthless utensil for their personal and political interests by taking advantage of men's illiteracy and prejudice we regret to say that we can not keep ourselves from dealing with this subject. But we should not forget that we will always meet such false prophets among mankind and everywhere till religion is isolated from all sorts of superstitions and till religious knowledge is enlightened by the fruits of sciences (1927)."¹⁵

"Our religion never teaches our nation inferiority, miserliness and to be despised. On the contrary, both Allah and His Prophet order individuals and nations to maintain their dignity and glory (1923)."¹⁶

After having quoted only a few of Atatürk's utterances with regard to Islamic religion and his faith in it briefly, I think it is time to review and

¹¹ *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, Ankara 1959 - 2nd. ed., vol. 11, p. 90.

¹² *Op. cit.*, vol. 111, p. 70.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, vol. 11, p. 66-7.

¹⁴ S. Borak, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-7.

¹⁵ *Nutuk*, vol. 11, p. 708.

¹⁶ *Atatürk Diyor Ki*, M.E.B.- İstanbul, 1980, p. 62.

reconsider his practices dealt with his afore stated desire to give the religion its pure and original character. As it may have been lucid so far, one of the most important issues he has concerned with and sensitive about was this observation of the deprivation of the religion of its glory by those who use it for their capricious intentions and the captivity and enslavement of the Islamic countries from the east to the west by the enemies due to Muslims' ignorance and indifference of the Islamic truth¹⁷. *"During the time just prior to our Independence War, all of the Islamic countries including Istanbul, which was the center of that time of the Islamic caliphate were under the invasion and governance of the enemies. This situation was quite shameful and blameworthy for both a religion which was full of enthusiasm and freedom and for those who follow it. To welcome and to submit this humiliating inferior status was after all disobeyance to the essentials of the religion itself.*

Therefore, the War of Independence that is started by the national forces was not but the evident result of both religious and national awakening. At that period the caliphate had fallen into a helpless situation and was unable to move as if it accepted its predestination and was convinced that it completed its historical mission. As a matter of fact, the value of caliphate as a ruling body which has throughout centuries been a matter of controversy and very many different opinions have been put forward about its legality and validity has recently come mean no more than a symbolical post. The fact was that "the caliphate" was regarded as a fundamental of the religion only by Shiites but for the Najadites, one of the Kharijite sects, it was an unnecessary office while for the Sunnites it was merely an organization having nothing to do with the essence of the religion itself. In addition to the foregoing facts, Muslim scholars stated so many conditions necessary to be a legal caliph and it was impossible from the religious standpoint to find many of those conditions on the present caliphs. So, the caliphate looked to be a political figure in the symbolical sense. And it would be quite a useless, unnecessary effort to insist on an institution which completed its mission historically especially at a time when the concept of "the National Sovereignty" was prevailing. And the persistence on the caliphate on the other hand would necessarily bring several responsibilities for the young Turkish Republic which has newly come out of the Independence War and this would necessarily lead the state to the point that it would be inevitable for it to take all the necessary measures and to make all the decisions as was the case in the past to liberate the captivated Islamic countries and to give an end to the foreign invasion. It would also be foolishness for a young Nation to

¹⁷ S. Borak, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

consider itself as "the Suzerain of the world" which has sacrificed millions of its children wherever it had gone and offered thousands of Anatolian Turks generously for the defence of the deserts of Yaman, Syria, Iraq and Egypt and such foolishness should not continue any more"¹⁸.

On the other hand, Atatürk said on the first of March, 1924, while he opened the first meeting of the second term sessions of the Grand National Assembly: *"We see it necessary that the religion of Islam with which we are pleased and satisfied, must be set apart from and held above political struggle unlike what had been the case for centuries. It is an urgent necessity for the bliss of our nation both in this and the world to come to deliver our sacred and celestial consciences as quick as possible and forever from all kinds of politics which is vague and incongruous in nature and which may easily turn out to be an arena for all caprices and ambitions. We can only by this way materialize the sanctity of the Islamic religion."*

Some measures had to be taken to actualize this goal. And eventually, on March, 3, 1924, having submitted three acts one after another, the Caliphate was abrogated (Act. No: 431); the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Foundations and the Ministry of Warfare (Act. No: 429) was abolished. And the right of acting laws concerning civil rights and obligations in the Republic of Türkiye and to execute them were vested to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and to the governments it forms. And to make all necessary decisions dealing with religious affairs regarding beliefs and rituals of the upright Islamic religion and to sway all the religious institutions a Directorate of Religious Affairs was established¹⁹, and finally, all the institutions of education and training in Türkiye ... and all the madrasas were transformed and attached to the Ministry of Education²⁰, the integration in education was thus achieved (Act. No: 430).

When all these codes of law are considered together we will observe that they are aiming to prevent misuse of religion for politics and trying to give religion its due value and respect and to approach it with veneration. The main point the Revolution was emphasizing "was to create an atmosphere full of respect and veneration to religious thoughts and be-

¹⁸ *Nutuk*, vol. 11, p. 712.

¹⁹ *Zabıt Ceridesi*, vol. VII, pp. 23-26; *Nutuk*, vol. 11, pp. 849-50.

²⁰ *Nutuk*, vol. 11, p. 850.

liefs"²¹. And the first step to realize this demand was to acquire the freedom of opinion, conscience and religion. Exactly, the 70th paragraph of the Constitution of 1924 which conveys freedom of opinion and conscience was accepted and liberty of religion and worshipping has been guaranteed by the Act No: 75 and it was ascertained by the Act No:80: "All kinds of education are regarded as to be free so long as they are under government control and within the boundaries of the law." As it is known, this constitution continued on to be valid till the Constitution of 1961 passed.

Let's turn to Atatürk's own remarks. He says: "Religion is a matter of conscience. Everybody is free to obey what his or her conscience enjoins him or her. We respect religion. We are not against the freedom of thought and meditation..."²².

"Religion and sect concern the individual's own conscience. No one can force another to accept any religion or a sect. It is prohibited to use religion as an item for politics"²³.

"Every individual is vested with the right and freedom of what he wants to believe in and is tolerated to have his own way of political tendency. He is also free to perform or neglect, if he so wishes, obligations of any religion he chooses. No one is allowed to interfere with other's ideas and conscience. Freedom of conscience is absolute, impartible and can not be touched. It must be considered as one of the most important natural rights achieved by individual so far... Every individual in Turkey is free to choose his own religion as well as he is allowed to perform ceremonies and rituals of that religion. In other words, the freedom to observe rituals is guaranteed by the Constitution. But without doubt that the rituals can not be harmful to the state of peace and the general codes of ethics. Neither it can be exerted as a political demonstration or a parade. Unlike many examples witnessed in the past, Turkish Republic can no more tolerate such instances"²⁴.

"In the Turkish Republic, everybody is free to worship Allah as he wishes. None can be questioned on account of his religious ideas. Turkish Republic has no official religion..."²⁵.

²¹ Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, vol. 111, p. 78.

²² S. Borak, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

²³ Kılıç Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

²⁴ A. Afet İnan, *M. Kemal Atatürk'ten Yazdıkları*, İstanbul, 1971, pp. 85-6.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

*"First of all, we should make certain as the basic religious reality that there is not a privileged class in our religion. Our religion which refuses to ascribe religious authority of any sort to some persons does not preach inclusiveness either..."*²⁶.

*"Particularly it is true for our religion that each believer has his own criteria in his hand. You can easily judge by means of these criteria what is harmonious with this religion and what is not. Whatever is unacceptable to reason, logic and beneficiary to the advantages of the people, be sure that it is also inconformity with our religion. If something is in accord with reason, logic and not harmful to the advantages of the nation then stop asking whether it is Islamic or not. It is Islamic. If our religion was not a religion of reason and logic, it would not have been perfect. It would not have been the last religion either..."*²⁷.

In fact, the liberty of religion and conscience is one of the most inevitable fundamentals of Islam. It is commanded in the Holy Kuran: *"None is subject to force in the religion"*²⁸. It is also enjoined in the Kuran: *"O Muhammad! If your Lord so wished, all on earth would have believed. While it is so, are you the one who will coerce human beings to believe?"*²⁹. And in many other verses of the Kuran it is cited: *"Upon prophet is but to communicate what he is revealed..."*³⁰.

Actually, after the nullification of the dictum *"The religion of the Turkish state is Islam"* which appeared both in the Constitution of 1924 and in the second paragraph of the Constitution issued on April, 19, 1928, a proposal was submitted which reads: *"The principle of separation between religion and state should never implicate ungodliness of the State and the Government. The separation between the affairs of state and religion is a security to protect religion from being a toy in the hands of the statesmen of today and of those to come for this reason, the practice has been in accordance with the premise that religion which promises mankind bliss and tranquility should maintain its untouchable, lofty position over the conscience as a sacred tie between Allah and person..."*³¹.

²⁶ Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, vol. 11, p. 144.

²⁷ U. Kocatürk, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-210.

²⁸ Kur'an - Baqara, Ch. 11, verse: 256.

²⁹ Kur'an - Yunus, Ch. X, verse: 99.

³⁰ Kur'an - Mâidah, Ch. V, verse= 99, Also see: Al-i Imrân, Ch. III, verse: 20; Nahl, Ch. XVI, verses: 35, 82; Nûr, Ch. XXIV, verse: 54; Ankebût, Ch. XXIX, verse: 18; Ghashiyah, Ch. LXXXVIII, verses: 21-22.

³¹ Çetin Özek, *Türkiye'de Laiklik*, İstanbul, 1962, p. 40 quoted from *Zabıt Cerîdesi*, Devre: 111, p. 3.

On the other hand, after the disestablishment of Madrasas Atatürk saw the necessity to prevent religious culture from being misused by some ignorant, religious minded men and wanted to locate religion in its proper place. To realize this he thought there must have been a serious, healthy education. He said:

*"We have not a privileged religious class. We are all equal. We are equally bound to learn the rules of our religion. Every individual needs a source to learn his religious credo and catechism. This place will no doubt be the school."*³².

*"All sources of knowledge and wisdom in our country must be the same. All the children of this country, men and women, must be trained equally in those institutions. But we should likewise establish well equipped institutions of higher education which will train authorities and experts well equipped with scientific habits and talents who are able to do studies on the philosophy of the religious facts and those who are capable of conveying them in addition to experts and specialists in every field"*³³.

In 1925, two years after these words of Atatürk affirming the necessity to reconsider religious education most seriously, İnönü, the Prime Minister of the day, spoke in response to those criticized secular system and the integration of education and to those who regarded them as godlessness, he said: *"To picture our operations as being contrary to religion is a non-observance of the task.*

*We are of the opinion that the task has nothing to do with ungodliness. If we become successful in this system and follow the new route patiently, all the people in the world and even those who are opposing us today or those who are doubtful about the new policy in the name of religion will see ten years later that Islam realized in its purest and most perfect form in our country..."*³⁴.

But this kind of approach to the issue has strengthened the strict secular policy that maintained the liberation of state and politics from the influence of religion with the aid of such factors as the political circumstances of the time, activities of some prejudiced religious-minded men who stimulated people to revolt against the régime, Saikh Said's rebellion,

³² Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, vol. 11, p. 90.

³³ *Op. cit.*, vol. 11, p. 90.

³⁴ Beyza Bilgin, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi*, Ankara, 1980, p. 45 quoted from *Muallimler Birliği Mecmuası*, Year: 1, No: 4.

the Manaman event, activities of the Republican Progressive Party which began propagating slogans like "*the Party is respectful to opinions and religious beliefs*" among the masses who have neither opportunity nor capability to pursue after the truth, and finally the disestablishment of takkas and zaviyahs and the growing complaints of some followers of the tariqas who took their places beside discontented groups.

It seems to me, if such ignorant and prejudiced activities as these had not occurred, it could have been possible for the state to continue religious education seriously and without interruption. In fact, a faculty of Divinity within the body of Dar al-Funun of Istanbul was established in the light and realization of the 4th paragraph of the Law ordering integrity of education which read: "*The Ministry of Education will open a faculty of Divinity within the framework of Dar al-Funun to train religious authorities of high standard, and in addition it will open schools to train officials who will be in charge of leading religious performances and giving sermons at mosques.*"

Because of the aforementioned reasons however, this institution had to seal its doors in 1933 and from that moment on there have been no religious education in Türkiye till the opening of the present faculty of Divinity of Ankara University in 1949. This was so in spite of the fact that the unity of education had been guaranteed by the constitution. A religious education carried on an academic level could make the reconstruction of an up-to-date Islamic reality in its purest form, an Islam which is able to meet the recent needs of the day by referring to its original sources. It could also accomplish the task of giving religion its own original unifying character and most important of all it could realize the unification of the people for the modernization of Türkiye. It could contribute easily to make the innovations understood to the people and the negative incidents which we encounter now and then would not occur.

The discontinuity of the training of sophisticated religious men officially was not approved by religious compatriots in the country who believed in the Reform either³⁵. And worst of all an irresponsible, unorganized and illegal religious training started. It is a commonly shared fact that falsity prevails where genuinness is lacking. And exactly this was the case at that time. The government, feeling the necessity of returning to the principles put by Atatürk very realistically, and that was upon his ob-

³⁵ Fehmi Yavuz, *Din Eğitimi ve Toplumumuz*, Ankara, 1969, pp. 45, 46.

servance of the seriousness of the situation, opened religious classes in the primary schools beginning from 1947. After three days from this pleasing event, we see Mr. Tahsin Banguoğlu, the Minister of Education explaining the reason of interruption in religious education till that time in the following words:

*"Religious education has never been prohibited. Atatürk has never acted against religion. But we did not want to tolerate some prejudiced religious - minded men to cheat and deceive people using courses of religion. For the advantage and necessity of reform, religious lessons and vocational religious education has been neglected by the state on purpose. This does not implicate the denial of the existence and necessity of the institution of religion for our country"*³⁶.

Eventually, the religious education has entered a new era by the opening of the Faculty of Divinity in 1949 and later by the establishment of both religious high schools and divinity faculties. These intitutions have not reached the level of maturity yet as we expect them to be but we are sure they form a healthy, serious basis for a bright hopeful future and are trying as they appear in Atatürk's own words to be *"the high standard institutions capable of training real distinguished scholars equipped with scientific research abilities to do studies on the philosophical reality of our religion and to teach them efficiently."*

³⁶ B. Bilgin, *op. cit.*, p. 57 quoted from *Vatan Gazetesi*, 22 Şubat (February) 1948.