CHAPTER V

The Institutional Politics of Laiklik in Kemalist Turkey

How did the institutional relations in Turkey between state and religion get locked in on state-salaried imams administered by the state’s Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) and on religion courses on Sunni Islam in the public school curriculum? In Third Republic France, the struggle between anticlericalism and state-civil religionism was resolved by aiming at liberal institutionalism—law as defining general and neutral institutions of society and these institutions embodying uncertainty vis-à-vis concrete political outcomes of conflicts taking place under them. State-civil religionism rested on the idea of a majority religion and the utility of religion. Political Catholics advanced the most explicitly utilitarian arguments on religion. In Turkey, however, most moments of institutional change were directly top down, and even when they were not, they excluded through different mechanisms those actors, such as minorities and the left, who could potentially produce these liberal arguments.

The struggle in Turkey has remained encapsulated between anticlericalism and state-civil religionism, the former also frequently joining the ranks of the latter. State-salaried imams and religion courses have been used like levers to mobilize as well as demobilize religion. After the coup d’état in 1980, the Kemalist military constitutionalized compulsory Sunni religion courses in the public school curriculum and redefined the constitutional role of state-salaried imams as serving national solidarity. The portion of the literature that takes Kemalist laicism as anticlerical qualifies this moment either as a mere
contradiction or as some kind of necessity emerging from the different nature of Islam for reaching laicism in a Muslim society. However, the constituent assembly debates in the making of the military constitution of 1982 show that the military’s institutional preferences came from an explicit interest in mobilizing religion (as the cement of society) against leftist movements and had nothing to do with the “threat of Islam.” As some Third French Republicans were trying to abstract a general notion from religion in order to “improve the moral physiognomy of the republic,”1 or against “an excess of taste for material well-being,”2 the Kemalist Turkish military officers were, in the words of one of them, “giving a course in the culture of religion, not a course on religion,”3 on utilitarian grounds against the left. As one member in the Constituent Assembly put it: “Instead of . . . Lenin, Mao, and Castro, let’s teach the Turkish child his/her religion in a real sense and under the license of the state within the principles of Atatürk.”4 The military reinterpreted some examples from Europe and pushed the distinction between religion as such and religion as culture in order to normalize this anomaly. Of the people who applauded the military for such an act, most were religious leaders, and one of them is reported to have remarked that military “revolutionaries [İhtilalciler] did what republican governments could not do.”5 The coup cleared the ground of leftist movements and handed society over to Islamist movements to mobilize. The 1982 moment was a landmark in the history of the republic for its authoritarian means but definitely not for its institutional politics of religion.

The first major shift in the politics of state-salaried imams and religion courses happened with the transition to a multiparty system in 1945 in the context of the emerging Cold War. The official records of the Turkish parliament provide no evidence as to the origins of the idea of state-salaried imams administered by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (established in 1924). We do not know, for instance, whether the directorate was modeled after the Direction des Cultes that existed before the separation in the Third French Republic. This chapter documents from the records of the Turkish parliament (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi) and other primary sources that in establishing this institution, Turkey’s founding Republican People’s Party (CHP) shared the same political ends as the French Républicains opportunistes discussed in chapter 3. The union of education laws in Turkey in 1924 would separate education from religion, and the DRA would make sure that religion did not mobilize to the political level and become a regime threat. In the words of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, it aimed
to “liberate the religion of Islam, within which we have been living peacefully and happily with devotion, from the customary ways in which it has become a means of politics [vasıtâ-i siyaset] (Bravo, applause).”

The lack of a counterpart like the Catholic Church in Turkey did not radically change the paradigm of separation. Républicains opportunistes in France were guarding against the Catholic Church and religious orders while the Kemalist laicists were only guarding against religious orders (tarîkat). But in both cases state-salaried imams/clerics prevented alternative claims on the sphere of religion with the potential to countermobilize a movement at the regime level and at the same time maintain the majority religion as the cement of society. At that point, it was anticlerical and opportunistically not antireligious. At the dawn of Turkey’s transition to a multiparty system in 1945, a widely shared perception among the CHP—similar to the perception among republicans in the French Third Republic after the fall of the monarchists in the elections of 1889—was that the regime was consolidated. And from this critical juncture common to France and Turkey, France institutionally separated religion and the state while the CHP turned toward the DRA and religion courses in the public school curriculum to mobilize Sunni Islam, first against socialism along the exact antisocialist line some Républicains opportunistes pushed in the 1890s when they renamed themselves Républicains progressistes, and second against the rising liberal conservative Democrat Party, in order to preempt the DP’s challenge to the CHP’s past anticlericalism. The paradigm of separation had changed. As one CHP member put it in the 1947 party convention, “Today, the Kemalist Revolution [that] we have embraced as a nation has resolved problems once and for all. Dear friends, since superstition has been understood and the revolution embraced, I believe that to instruct our children in the fundamentals of religion in primary schools . . . has many moral benefits.” As another remarked in the December 24, 1946, session of the parliament, “Consciences and hearts are like patries. If they are left vacant, they will be occupied by the enemy. We are not afraid of these new religions [socialism], but we are afraid of our own religion . . . . Religion has an otherworldly [çevresi] side, and also a practical [tasarrufi] side.”

In contrast to the Third French Republic debate, the shared antisocialism of the CHP and DP encapsulated the terms of the debate over the institution of state-salaried imams and religion courses in the public school curriculum to one premised on the “law of majorities” rather than on “diversity.” The utilitarian politics of religion were not specific to the CHP of that time.
The first parliamentary discussion in 1951 on the future of state-salaried imams during the DP government shows that what framed the debate over separating or keeping the institution was a question of which option would provide a stronger religion to fight communism. The position of “separation for more religion” was also present in the French Third Republic but as just a few dissident political Catholic voices. The DP increased the state budget for state-salaried imams even further and moved the optional religion courses from outside class hours to within class hours and changed the terms from opt-in to opt-out. These institutional changes were hotly debated among teachers and DP ministers at the annual National Education Congress in 1953, where many examples from European cases were laid on the table. This discussion focused more on institutional principles; however, it was still framed by the idea of a Sunni Muslim majority country disregarding non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims. It also exposed further vicissitudes of making liberalism compatible with even optional religion courses during class hours, such as utilitarian approaches to religion being able to penetrate liberal principles with less than visible, minute institutional adjustments.

In another critical juncture, during the development of the military constitution of 1961, which drew the institution of state-salaried imams into the constitution, there were a few non-Muslim, non-Sunni Muslim, and liberal republicans in the Constituent Assembly. Although they were not able to change the outcome, they ignited the most important discussions, supported by some minority petitions to the Constituent Assembly. And at all these moments, various political actors were trying to situate disparate institutional politics of religion and secularism within what they understood European secularism to be.

The Kemalist Republican People’s Party: Républicains Opportuniste or Combistes?

Authoritarianism in the single-party era (1923–1945) against all political or societal opposition has been significantly documented. It is clear from parliamentary discussions at critical moments that the Republican People’s Party’s institutional choices on religion were the result of their political goal to preempt religion from becoming a focal point of countermobilization to the republican regime. In a speech he gave in January 1923, Mustafa Kemal stated that “our religion is the most reasonable and most natural
religion, and it is precisely for this reason that it has been the last religion. In order for a religion to be natural, it should conform to reason, technology, science, and logic. Our religion is totally compatible with these.”¹¹ In his famous *Speech* delivered to the Turkish nation over three days in October 1927, Mustafa Kemal explained why a constitutional amendment on October 29, 1923, declaring the founding of the Turkish Republic also included an article (article 2)¹² declaring Islam as the state religion:

After the founding of the Republic, while the new Constitution was being made, with the purpose of not providing an opportunity for those who are inclined to interpret the phrase “laic government” as antireligious [*dinsizlik*] and take advantage of such an interpretation, it has been allowed that a meaningless phrase [declaration of a state religion] be added to article 2 of the constitution. . . . The Nation should remove these unnecessary phrases from the Constitution at the first opportunity!¹³

On March 1, 1924, two days before the March 3, 1924, laws passed parliament and abolished the caliphate, created a public education system, and established the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Mustafa Kemal remarked that the aim was to “liberate” Islam from becoming a “means of politics” (*vasıta-i siyaset*):

Honorable members! The principle of keeping the army separate from the general life of the country is a point which the Republic always regards as fundamental. (*Applause.*) In the path which has been followed thus far; armies of the Republic, as the trustworthy and strong guards of the motherland, have kept a venerable and powerful place. Along the same lines, we see the reality that it is indispensable to liberate the religion of Islam, within which we have been living peacefully and happily with devotion, from the customary ways in which it has been a means of politics. (*Bravo, applause.*)¹⁴

On March 3, during the parliamentary discussions on the abolishment of the caliphate, the minister of justice remarked:

ADLIYE VEKİLİ SEYİD B. In Islam, unlike christianity, there is no spirituality [*ruhaniyet*]; in other words there is no spiritual Government [*Hükümeti...*]
ruhaniye]. . . . The Nation says . . . I do not need a representative [vekil]. I will manage my own affairs with the most beneficial form of Government, that is the Republic, and the procedure of consultation [mesveret]. In that case, who can say what? Nobody can say anything. Because the right belongs to the nation. (Applause.) Kuran-i Kerim as well points out to its permission with clarity. It says that muslims manage their own affairs among themselves with consultation. (Applause.) . . . All the civilized world has been advancing on the route of progress with giant steps. Are we going to be left behind? . . . How odd! if we muslims . . . were left behind when the Religion of Islam is so noble and so progressive. (Laughs and applause.)

State religion was removed from the constitution on April 9, 1928, by a vote of 264 to 51. In the foreign press this removal was depicted as the abolition of religion in Turkey. The proposal was signed by İsmet Paşa, the man who became the second president of the Turkish Republic after the death of Mustafa Kemal, and 120 other members. The constitutional change was presented as another step toward the laic state; however, it was followed immediately by a cautious preemptive argument on how laiklik was not being antireligious (dinsizlik):

The principle of the separation of religion and state should not imply the advocacy of irreligion [dinsizlik] by the state or by the government. The separation of affairs of Religion and State is the guarantee for the prevention of religions from being tools in the hands of those who govern the state. The Turkish Revolution [İnkılap], in light of the experience and knowledge it has acquired from the contemporary science of law and from history, by removing the article which mixes the affairs of religion with that of the world and which is inclined to cause various difficulties, and by providing the Constitution [Teşkilatı Esasiye] by a clear and sincere text, will have given the Turkish Republic in a pure form its real shape. In this manner, religion, which undertakes the spiritual [manevi] happiness of mankind, by obtaining its exalted place in the conscience, will have become a sacred means of contact between God and the individual [ferr]. There are those who find this sacred contact in Mosques or Churches, Synagogue or just in their conscience. The State and its laws are the protector of those all.
Halide Edib Adivar, a well-known republican novelist, commented on the removal of state religion from the constitution in her article in the *Yale Review*, pointing out that institutional separation in Turkey was still incomplete as long as the Directorate of Religious Affairs was a state institution:

No secular state can logically have an established state religion. The removal of this clause [on state religion] from the Turkish constitution was therefore in true and necessary accord with the nature of the new Turkish state at its last stage of secularization. “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” The Turks have at last rendered up the things that are Caesar’s or the state’s. On the other hand, Caesar, or the state still keeps things that belong to God. Unless the Directorate of Religious Affairs is made free, unless it ceases to be controlled by the office of the Prime Minister as it is now controlled, it will always be a governmental instrument. In this respect, the Muslim community in Turkey is to-day less privileged and less independent than are the Christian Patriarchates . . . there is danger in it of the use of religion for political ends. Now that the state has rid itself entirely of religious control, it should, in turn, leave Islam alone. . . . The fundamental meaning of the long and very interesting phase of secularization is that the Turkish psychology separates this world from the next. To take religion out of the political state, but to keep the state in religious affairs, is one of the last phases which must be corrected.21

On February 5, 1937, the term *laik* was put in the constitution, religious orders (*tarikat*) were removed from the protection of article 75 on the freedom of conscience,22 and the freedom of philosophical opinion was now listed before freedom of religion. The minister of the interior explained in the parliament as follows:

**DA. V. ŞÜKRÜ KAYA.** We do not interfere at all with the freedom of conscience of the individual and the religion she/he wishes to follow. Everyone has freedom of conscience. The freedom we want, what we mean by laiklik [laicness] is to provide that religion is not influential and effective in the affairs of the country. For us this is the frame and boundary of laikçilik [laicism]. . . . We say that religions stay in the conscience and places of worship, and not interfere in material life or affairs of the world. We are not mixing them and we will not mix them. (*Bravo, applause.*) . . . One
other evil thing which the Turks have inherited is to be devoted to some kinds of religious orders [\textit{tarikat}]. To our knowledge, the only true path and \textit{tarikat} for the Turk is nationalism grounded on positive science. . . . For this reason, if here and there in the hearts of our citizens has there been any bounds left to these wrong paths, we want to eliminate for good these bounds and keep them \textit{away} from these religious orders with the decision of the Grand National Assembly. (\textit{Bravo}.)^{23}

There were few critics within the party on the state budget for imams; such criticism was always met with silence, and there was no engagement in discussion. One such view was expressed by Hakkı Kılıçoğlu:

\textbf{HAKKI KILIÇOĞLU}. Yet, I contend that there is an institution that is particularly in contradiction with the second article. The Directorate of Religious Affairs. (\textit{Some others laugh.}) I am not against this institution. I am not the enemy of religions or religious persons. But after leaving all religious matters to the conscience of the individual, I contend that, especially given the new second article of our constitution, this institution cannot have a place in the state budget.

Kılıçoğlu highlighted the contradiction between the two moves in the constitution: on the one hand, a move to privatize religion, and on the other hand, a move to make religion public by establishing a state-funded Directorate of Religious Affairs. “Maybe,” he remarked, “there is a formula which can reconcile these two forms.” Then he added, “I am not aware of this formula. . . . Yes we have places of worship, there are personnel who take care of these places. I am not saying that we don’t take care of these places. But statutes on these can be included directly as a separate section of the law on waqfs.”^{24}

The Union of Education Law (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) closed down religious schools (\textit{medrese}) and established a unified national education system. The 1924 law placed one hour of religious instruction per week in the third, fourth, and fifth grades of primary schools, but the same year religious instruction in secondary schools was reduced from a compulsory three hours to one hour per week. In 1928 compulsory religious education in secondary schools was completely eliminated.^{25} In 1930 primary school religious instruction was reduced to an optional half hour in the fifth grade, and in 1931 it was completely eliminated. Twenty-nine Imam Hatip four-year
secondary schools (schools for the education of Muslim clerics) were established in 1924 in place of the medreses in order to bring up imams and preachers loyal to the Republic. The number of Imam Hatip schools declined steadily from 1924 until 1930 because of a lack of students, and in the 1929–30 academic year they were all closed. The Faculty of Theology at Istanbul University was closed in 1933, after a report by a European scholar documented the small number of registered students.

Jean Baubérot, in a brief piece, finds Kemalism closest to Combisme among the republican currents of the Third Republic. Both placed the state in control of religion rather than institutional separation, both combatted religious orders, and both led or inspired movements that put the republic at the level of faith. The Turkish Language Association’s dictionary in 1945 had under the entry “religion” as an example for “religion as principle” the sentence, “The Turk’s religion is Kemalism.” The question of which Third Republic republican movements Kemalist laicism resembles the most is not an easy one. One cannot ignore the fact that these movements in the Third Republic were competing in elections and therefore had to calculate for winning votes and winning majorities in a diverse chamber, while this was not the case for the Kemalists, single-party regime. Both Opportunistes and Combistes were against religious orders. Opposing Assumptionists and Jesuits, groups that would at times get into conflict with the Vatican as well, was at the top of their anticlerical agenda. This was also the case for Kemalism: the banning of religious orders in 1925 and their removal from the protection of the constitutional article on freedom of conscience in 1937 are cases in point.

The main difference between the Opportunistes and Combistes was how they approached the institution of state-salaried clerics before separation and at the moment of separation in 1905. As documented in chapter 3, a “salaried church as opposed to a propertied” church was a guarantee against regime threats from monarchical movements for the Opportunistes in the 1880s under the constraint of elections; that is, they were calculating a loss of votes from a possible reaction from their voters to the cessation of state salaries for clerics. However, one part of the Opportunistes was also fighting against the Republican left. For instance, Jules Ferry did not allow a discussion on the practices of Catholicism in France and in 1883 in a letter to his wife stated, “We have reduced the clergy and religious orders to submission. . . . We can now pursue a moderate policy.” This wing of the Opportunistes renamed themselves as Républicains progressistes in the 1902 chamber, opposing the suppression of state salaries for clerics, not on grounds of a regime threat.
but, to the contrary, for maintaining religion as the cement of society. In other words, there was not only a contextual change—regime threat from monarchists had pretty much disappeared with the 1889 elections—but also a change in political ends. Combistes, on the other hand, mobilized state salaries for clerics to depower the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy in France quite radically, by laying off clerics they considered antirepublican; however, once they were convinced that the regime threat was gone toward the end of the Dreyfus Affair, they finally opted for separation.

Here the lack of a state-independent ecclesiastical hierarchy in Turkey makes the comparison difficult, for the question of how the Kemalist CHP would react to such an organization remains a counterfactual. However, the snapshots above from parliamentary discussions do show that the CHP also saw state-salaried imams as a guarantee against regime threats, with frequent statements that document that they did not want to look antireligious, similar to Jules Ferry’s famous statement, “We are anticlerical but not antireligious.” Recep Peker, general secretary of the CHP, at a conference at Istanbul University to introduce the party program in 1931, remarked: “Today, in Turkey religious view is a matter of individual conscience which belongs to each citizen,” however, “laiklik never means being without religion or to want to be without religion. In Turkey, everyone’s practice of worship, by each as he/she wants, is under the protection of the constitution. A citizen who considers him/herself religious can simultaneously keep his beliefs and sincerely be laique.”

With this preliminary comparative sketch, a critical question to push the comparison further is: what direction did Kemalist CHP’s laicism take once the party saw the republican regime as consolidated? That critical juncture came in 1946.

Kemalist Republican People’s Party’s New Spirit
with the Transition to a Multiparty System:
Républicains Progressistes?

The major opposition to the Republican People’s Party was the Democrat Party, founded on January 7, 1946. It was a conservative liberal party of big landowners, and its founders were former CHP members who had disagreed with the party mainly on the question of land reform. Among the new parties formed with the transition to a multiparty system were also
socialist parties. Although the socialists did not have much presence on the political scene, their mere existence was sufficient to influence CHP policies in the international atmosphere of the Cold War. At the time the CHP and DP were accusing each other of being soft on the left, and on December 16, 1946, the Turkish Socialist Party and Turkish Socialist Workers and Peasants Party were shut down by martial law. In the parliamentary elections of July 21, 1946, the DP gained 66 seats (as opposed to CHP’s 395). The election’s validity, however, has been widely contested; therefore the 66 seats do not necessarily represent the exact support for the DP at the time. In the next elections, on May 14, 1950, the DP received 52.7 percent of the vote and 408 seats in the parliament (CHP, 39.4 percent and 69 seats; Nation Party, 4.6 percent and 1 seat). Article 14 of its 1951 party program stated:

Our party understands laiklik as the complete detachment of the state in politics from religion, and that no religious creed is influential in the ordering and application of law and refuses the misinterpretation of laiklik as antireligiousness. It takes religious freedom, like other freedoms, as among the sacred rights of humanity. It is necessary that a program is prepared by experts on the question of religious education and institutions for the education of clergymen. Faculty of theology in the university and institutions similar in scientific regards should be autonomous as other similar institutions of the National Education Ministry. The use of religion as a political tool, as a propaganda tool for disrupting love and solidarity among citizens, or for igniting feelings of fanaticism as opposed to free thought must not be tolerated.

The period from 1946 until 1950 saw a return to religion by the CHP. In 1947 the CHP provided funding for the hajj to Mecca, and in 1949 it included optional religion courses for fourth- and fifth-grade primary school students to be administered on Saturdays. Parents had to petition for their children to attend the class. The CHP also reopened the İmam Hatip schools. In 1947 it almost doubled the budget of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, from 0.15 percent in 1946 to 0.24 percent of the state budget (see figure 5.1). The parliamentary discussions of December 24, 1946, on the national education budget already had some clues as to the nature of this return to religion. This discussion portrays an internal CHP debate only, for the DP parliamentarians were not present in the parliament at the time.
They had boycotted budget discussions by leaving the parliament a week earlier and had still not returned. In this session of the parliament, Muhittin Baha Pars (CHP) complained about the decline in the moral conditions of the country, pointing out three examples: an editor protesting against moralist children’s books, a case of rape, and a free public talk in the liberal Beyoğlu district of Istanbul, all of which for him epitomized self-indulgence preempting national consciousness, and that new “leftist religions” had emerged. I return to a speech quoted from earlier:

Muhittin Baha Pars. Consciences and hearts are like patries. If they are left vacant, they will be occupied by the enemy. We are not afraid of these new religions, but we are afraid of our own religion. . . . Religion has an other-worldly [uhrevi] side, and also a utility [tasarrufi] side. I will not talk about that side [the other worldly side]. Nobody has the right to interfere between God and the subject. . . . But religions have moral sides. Every child, every young person should know this closely. . . . Friends, wisdom [hikmet] starts with the fear of God. . . . I am not saying that [religion] is the only way of improving public morality. . . . We do not want to destroy what Atatürk started, we want to support it. If Atatürk were alive, he would also do the same. . . . I think this matter should be discussed in this budget.

Another CHP parliamentarian pointed out that public opinion wanted to see a “more virtuous, soft-spirited, abstemious, appreciative” youth and complained that all moral instruction had been removed from primary school and after (431). Hamdullah Suphi Tannöver remarked as follows and with comparative references:

Hamdullah Suphi Tannöver. Great love and great faith have created great periods in the history of nations. When defeat starts in the spirits, faith collapses, if a faith of similar strength does not replace the collapsed faith . . . disaster has started. Two faiths can be given to the Turkish youth. There is also a third faith, the Turkish public refuses it, it is a social and political faith. We see that one in other countries, like Communism. In this country, one can find a few fools who would defend this one as a principle of education. But the conscience of the Turkish Nation has removed it from its horizons. Another faith . . . is religion. And there is also a new faith: our nationhood. . . . I consult our Minister of National
Education to say something clear on nationhood to the child he takes from the hands of the Turkish mother and father and brings to the State school. (437–38)

He gave examples of the resilience of religion in Russia and underlined that in Turkey as well religion had to be put in place as a source of morality. Then he turned to France:

**Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver.** The French revolution was the site of many antireligious activities. Churches were seized. These churches, except two of them, were returned to religion and in the year 1913, during my visit to Paris, I saw the French public worshipping in Notre Dame Church. . . . During the Combes government, France separated religion from the State, but it was allowed that all institutions belonging to religion are kept alive by the public. . . . There are seminaries, in other words, medreses in Paris. The French public satisfies its religion needs by its own organization. (439)

Next he turned back to the question of communism:

**Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver.** They have reached a level that worries us and this Government . . . courts, police, gendarme, punishments are not sufficient panaceas [for these currents]. We have to reinforce the spiritual make of the Turkish public against these illnesses. For that the opportunity has to be provided so that the Turkish nation can benefit from its great spiritual sources, religion and nationhood. (440)

Prime Minister Recep Peker responded to these remarks as follows:

**Başbakan Recep Peker.** In Turkey, religion, as it is not the case in many places, has ceased to be a danger to society, it is no longer a tool to worldly simple calculations and it has been put in its divine and celestial place. . . . I insist and believe it that nowhere in the world as in Turkey—including the laic States which have just been presented as examples . . . do citizens not face any reprimand [muatebe] in front of the law or the State for their faith and worship. (*Bravo.*) To the contrary, in all places of worship, the prayer and the worship of the citizen is under the protection of the State.
Our State does not only allow freedom of conscience, it defends it as the most important work of the revolution [İnkişaf]. (444–45)

He continued with how religion has been abused for self-interest:

Başbakan Recep Peker. Dear friends; those people who abuse a religious viewpoint, put the relation between conscience and God outside its limits and inflict the material world with its effect, are people who poison society. (Bravo.) Today here, the necessity of relying on certain ideal and spiritual wealth for protecting society from some malevolent social influences and doctrines was mentioned. Yes fundamentally, I appreciate it, but the one and only means for the protection against the mentioned poison is the feeling of the nation. (Bravo, applause.) To insist that a . . . devout muslim will not turn communist, or that religion in general provides a resistance to communism, is in contradiction with the realities of the day. . . . I am a muslim, my nation is Turkish, my political doctrine is Kemalist . . . in other words I am laic. (Bravo, strong applause.) With these attributes, no ideas or movement upsetting religion can emerge from me. But, for the tranquility of the patrie, I would fear giving way to religious propaganda. . . . Dear friends, the morality of the modern person has to be a morality that looks like the examples in the advanced scientific and human thoughts of today’s new world. . . . I have to say that the claim that there cannot be a consistent morality not based on religion . . . is just not true. . . . The real inner [manevi] force that will protect us against the dangerous currents we would like to avoid is the understanding of nationhood. I don’t think it is pertinent to present the case as if we are in pain from a lack of religiosity and our society is suffering in this regard. . . . I think that it is not beneficial or pertinent to discuss such deep and great matters in the narrow frame of a budget discussion. (Applause.) (445–46)

On September 28, 1947, the newspaper Cumhuriyet reported on an ex-military officer and DP parliamentarian arguing publicly that there was no morality without religion and discrediting the CHP’s attempt of what he called “trying to win broken hearts by putting optional religion courses in public schools.”40 The question of religion infrastructure was a major item in CHP’s Seventh Party Congress on November 17, 1947, and a general push for state funds into building religion infrastructure was clearly visible. One member remarked as follows:
Friends, you all know that, today, we have two institutions under the Prime Ministry. . . . One of these is the Directorate of Religious Endowments, the other one is the Directorate of Religious Affairs. But the Directorate of Religious Affairs is almost nonexistent. The Directorate of Religious Endowments is not in a condition to be able to care for and make live religious institutions. Friends, imams and hatips are hungry and destitute. (Voices: Allah Allah.) Yes, with thirty liras of wages can an imam or hatip be raised? It’s not the right moment for muttering Allah. This amount of money cannot feed religious ideas, religious thought in the country. Only by staying under these conditions does religion become a propaganda tool. The men of religion we need cannot be raised.⁴¹

The question of state funds for religion infrastructure was mainly addressed in the congress during the discussion of article 15 of the CHP party program, on laiklik. The article read:

Our Party regards the main factor of success in the improvement and progress of our nation, that all laws in the state administration, regulations, and procedures be made and applied according to contemporary civilization, according to the principals and forms derived from sciences and according to the necessities of this world, and that religious ideas are kept separate from affairs of the state and this world and from politics. Religion is a matter of conscience and therefore it is exempt from any kind of intervention. No citizen can be interfered with for worships and ceremonies not banned by law. (448)

During discussions on the laiklik article, investing in religion infrastructure was defended from various angles, but all concluded with its compatibility with laiklik. One CHP member, Vehbi Dayıbaş, differentiated between laiklik as a regime question and as state policy and argued that since the issue of laiklik as a regime question had been resolved, there could only be an advantage in a state policy of instituting courses on religion in primary schools:

VEHBI DAYıBAŞ. Today, the Kemalist revolution we have embraced as a nation has resolved problems once and for all. Dear friends, since superstition has been understood and the revolution embraced, I believe that to instruct our children in the fundamentals of religion in primary schools via a course program to be arranged by the Ministry of

LAİKLİK IN KEMALİST TÜRKİYE
National Education is not harmful, and to the contrary it has many moral benefits. . . . Most respected friends, those who go to churches and attend ceremonies there read something about their own religion. What will our children read during worship? We want our children to be instructed on this issue. (448)

Instead of leaving instruction in religion to private education, argued Dayıbaş, this could be dealt with in public schools via optional courses. A different angle was to point out that Mustafa Kemal was against religious orders but not religion. The second speaker, Abdulkadir Güney, advocated a course on religion in primary schools and a department of theology in universities. He maintained that a nation that studied its religion attained permanence and that instruction in religion did not contradict the six arrows of Kemalism. All immoralities and social calamities, he argued, resulted from a lack of attention to religion:

**ABDÜLKADIR GÜNEY.** I do not want to question our six arrows, but I want the meaning and understanding of these arrows to provide for the spiritual and temporal happiness of the nation and country by having them materialize in practice. Most respected friends, Eternal Chief Atatürk wanted to eliminate religious orders for he saw in these orders activities contrary to religion, morals, and humanity under the pretext of religion, and he thought this [elimination of religious orders] possible by including laiklik among the six arrows and he was successful in all this; but all this . . . does not mean that we should ignore the development of our religion. (449)

Another argument was to present the place of non-Muslim organizations under the Lausanne Treaty as a privilege and argue that Muslims were being discriminated against in their own country. The third speaker, Sinan Tekelioğlu, an ex-military officer with a law degree, acknowledged the plurality in Turkish society and pointed out what he saw as one of the most serious contradictions of Turkish laiklik: non-Muslims have more freedom in their religious affairs than the Muslim majority in Turkey.

**SINAN TEKELİOĞLU.** Dear friends, what is laiklik according to the science of law? Let me convey this according to my studies; laic does not mean being
without a religion. Laic means, as it is stated in our party program, and as
it is everywhere in the world, to separate the affairs of religion, the affairs
of the world, and the affairs of politics, and to give no privileges . . . to
any of the religions in this country. Now we can evaluate the program
prepared by our party: the first aspect of our definition is in place; but
there is also a second aspect of the definition; this is missing: to give no
privilege to any of the religions in the country. Yet this kind of an afﬁr-
mation has not been included in the program. Friends, according to the
Constitution in hand, all persons present in Turkey are Turks regardless of
their religion and race. Even a child born to foreign parents is a Turk until
he becomes 18 years of age. This child can choose the nationality he/she
wishes when he/she becomes 18 years of age. Friends, in our country,
according to its structure, I wonder if laiklik is present in its full meaning?
We look; affairs of religion, world, and politics have been separated, but
the second aspect is not present, why is it not present? There is a Directo-
rate of Religious Affairs, we pay the salaries of the ofﬁcials [Muslim clerics]
in its cadre. On the other hand there are Turkish christians and Turkish
jews. But these do not have representatives or members in the Directo-
rate of Religious Affairs. That means, we have given the administration of
their pious foundations to them and placed the “Directorate of Religious
Affairs” at the head of the religious community belonging to the religion
of Islam. . . . But we have left its hands tied. . . . Whereas christian and
jewish Turkish religious communities have established schools for them-
selves, have trained priests, rabbis, and grave diggers. But the Turks who
constitute 8/10 of this country . . . do not even have someone to bury
their dead. We never want our State to part with the principle of laiklik. To
part with the principle of laiklik is to go backward. We do not accept
traditional religious fundamentalism [irtica]. . . . I want the State to treat
Turkish religious persons at the same level as it treats other religious
people. . . . I want the Directorate of Religious Affairs, with all its cadre,
to be removed from the State cadre and placed above the directorate
of religious endowments [Vakıflar İdaresi], which has all the money our
ancestors have endowed for managing this religion [Islam]. . . . Let the
General Directorate of Religious Affairs with this money from the
directorate of religious endowments establish schools and train modern
and civilized hodjas, grave diggers, and imams who can preach to us.
(450–51)

LAİKLİK IN KEMALİST TÜRKİYE  [ 151 ]
Sinan Tekelioğlu also highlighted comparisons with the United States and United Kingdom to underscore that religiosity is also a part of Western modernity; taking care of its religion infrastructure and advocating religion as a source of morality would take the Turkish nation more toward the level of contemporary civilization, because all civilized nations take care of their religions:

**Sinan Tekelioğlu.** Friends, right now I am addressing the Turkish Nation as well as the whole world, by doing this Turks will not have taken a step back, they will never have traced back a step they had already taken forward; to the contrary, they will have reached the level of modern nations. Friends, if we look at modern nations, we will see how they give importance to religion. Remember how Churchill and Roosevelt were praying on the ship, friends; nations without a religion cannot survive, certainly one day comes and they become extinct. History has proved this. Friends; today, in our country, gambling has increased, alcohol consumption has increased, moral values are on the wane. In the country of a nation without a religion there is no fear left, for the nation to continue living, it has to fear something. For the continuity of its existence, an idea is necessary. No obedience to mothers, fathers, elders remains, no one respects each other if, when one is asked, what is God?, he/she does not know what God is. (*Noise and strong applause.*) (450–51)

Şükrü Nayman, again underlined religion as a source of morality for combating materialism, alluding to communism, and also offered comparative statements on Europe and the United States:

**Şükrü Nayman.** Friends, our Party, with this article that is the object of debate, by keeping the affairs of religion separate from affairs of State and politics and granting a complete freedom of conscience to the citizens, does not qualify as satisfying today’s needs. Today the Turkish Nation and Turkish youth are in need of spiritual [*manevî*] nourishment. In nations deprived of spiritual nourishment, and who only worship material things, the prevention of immorality has never been possible. In these cases humanity and society have fallen into mischief; history proves this and provides the most grand evidence. Friends, one who only worships material things, and a human being deprived of spiritual existence, before all other things, does not think of anything but to only spend his/her days with pleasure.
But if you look at [his/her] conscience, his/her mask falls and his/her terrifying state is revealed. Humanity has to embrace the spiritual ties of religion at all levels; as an individual, as a community, as a nation. Okay, how will the individual embrace these spiritual ties and from where will he/she provide for this need of his/hers? Friends, Let me speak frankly; we will find the means of satisfying this need only, and only in the laws of morality approved by the religion of Islam. (Applause.) These laws of morality will take this nation to the right path; today, those immoralities we complain of everywhere and all the time will be prevented. Most respected friends; to infuse human beings with spiritual nourishment is only possible through religion. To train the spirit is not possible outside religion. Because religion is a force that curbs tyrannical feelings and bad inclinations in human beings, society and individual are absolutely in need of religion. Friends; after having accepted that embracing spiritual ties is a necessity, I would like to say one thing briefly: as we can see, after the end of the war, radio stations in the United States and in Europe are incessantly broadcasting religious conferences, churches are full. On the other hand, we accept it as a novelty and are proud to do bridge and poker parties, men and women mixed, and set tables with alcoholic drinks, as opposed to setting iftar tables. (Voices: there is no such thing.) . . . Most respected friends; if we want to serve laiklik in its true sense and think as real revolutionaries [İnkılapçı], we have to accept that the time has come and even passed that we help the development of religious education in the Turkish homeland. . . . We removed the ideals of religion, but what did we replace them with? We accept that 80 percent of our population is illiterate. Were we able to vaccinate them with love of patrie and nation? Who can defend that? In that case, we cannot demolish spiritual wealth, we have to offer religious education in schools. (451–52)

Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver listed many examples from Europe to underscore the point that laiklik and provision for the religious needs and services of the nation are compatible. Tanrıöver repeated the examples from Russia and France he had iterated in the December 24, 1946, parliamentary debate. The former, in his view, was a case of the impossibility of eliminating religion and religiosity; the latter, of how separation of religion and state does not interfere in religious practices. He added the examples of Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, and the United States, all laic states in which freedom of religion is freedom to build and maintain infrastructures, how some
universities used to be seminaries, how all these countries have missionary organizations operating even in Turkey (455). “If similarly in our history, medreses were reformed, we could have been proud for having nine-century-old universities . . . but instead, we shut down Medreses and imam hatip schools.”

Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver. Dear friends, today we have forty thousand villages, I imagine one small mosque [Mescit] in each. . . . I bring in front of my eyes towns and cities, at least ten thousand mosques. . . . Friends, do we need imams and hatips to serve in these Mescits and Mosques or not? (Voices: Yes, we do.) . . . There is no need to panic, our [Kemalist] revolution cannot be destroyed. . . . Dear friends, I want to come to a point: the Turkish revolution’s religious prosecution, under the influence of bitter experiences of the past periods, belonging to generations who suffer from men who speak in the name of religion, we closed these institutions. We did this as a temporary precaution; it cannot be permanent. Because, on the planet, there is no such laic State.

Dear friends . . . in Bosnia, Yugoslavians have referred some men to court . . . then to prison . . . müftüs and imams. . . . Dear friends; because Communism diffuses like a religion, everywhere it follows clerics. In that case, if we do not open İmam Hatip schools, teach at our Istanbul University, History of Islam and history of Islamic Philosophy as matters of science like in all world universities . . . and open a higher education institution for religion, I wonder, where these poor minorities will get the men they need to defend themselves. Not only for our country, but also for the needs of the minorities we left outside we have to think about these institutions. (457–59)

Cemil Sait Barlas challenged Tanrıöver’s comparative examples and his position on the use of state funds:

Cemil Sait Barlas. Friends; I am a man whose nine-year-old daughter gets private religion courses at home. I believe that a religion course is a fundamental element of Turkishness and Turkish culture. . . . But my understanding of laïklik is not like Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver’s at all. In fact, nowhere in the world is laïklik the way he understands it. The Turk’s essence is neither religion nor faith. . . . The Turk’s last bastion is in the noble blood in his veins. (Applause.) Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, the
information you have provided is totally wrong. . . . When does the State give money to the church in America, would you tell me? The Catholic universities in Belgium, don’t they receive the money from the Pope? How much money has the German State given to Heidelberg University? . . . I defend religious reform, but this we cannot do, a man trained as a soldier cannot do a religious reform, Luther was a priest. . . . Hamdullah Suphi Tannöver, are you a priest or a hodja that you will carry on a religious reform? (459)

Barlas defended keeping to the original understanding of laiklik and not mixing it with anticommunism. He argued that in Europe laiklik had started with antireligious movements—for example, Bismarck against the Catholic Church and the French state against the Jesuits—and that in comparison Turkish laiklik has also been antireligious. He remarked that “religion should stay as a private matter between the subject and God” (460) and expressed his surprise at what he found was a change in position of somebody who had once carried flags in the country, like Hamdullah Suphi Tannöver.

Behçet Kemal Çağlar warned against plans for short-term gain in the transition to a multiparty system:

BEHÇET KEMAL ÇAĞLAR. Friends, what the real believer . . . regards best for his/her religion and faith is that . . . they are not casually made a tool of world affairs and political games. . . . Hamdullah Suphi Tannöver who would recount the deadly harms of zealotry better than anyone else, but with hyperbolic language bordering on irreligion [dinsizlik], is . . . from the Türk Ocakları [a nationalist organization founded in 1912]. We used to repeat the words of the Türk Ocakları orators with a smile of tolerance, “every minaret is a gravestone and underneath lies a village of islam,” as a radical attack on religious conservatism. Then he was inclined to irreligion. Now, as an atonement of conscience, he redeems himself by inclining toward religious conservatism. We are rather in the middle of these two positions and take as a principle the separation of politics and religion. . . . Do we have to rely on examples taken from various parts of Europe? Why does the Turkish nation always turn to absolutely following [Europe] as a necessity? Today, even Europe is in the making, trying out new ways of becoming in a broad sense. The Church has reactionary politics, novelty is also novelty in the West, and conservatism (irtica) is also conservatism in the West. Respectful Tannöver, who remarked that religion is
unifying, does he forget that Hitler was also praying to . . . God, King George as well. Their subjects destroyed each other, they were from the same religion. . . . religious sect fought in Anatolia. . . . We are Kemalists to our marrow. According to our principles, religion is separate from the State and politics. The State does not interfere in religion. . . . Who prevents the building of mosques? Let the believers build their Mosques instead of expecting it from the State. . . . [Anybody] who would teach religion in a town should meet the same ease and [bureaucratic] formalities as somebody who would open a knitting course. . . . If this is what is demanded, this is reasonable. (462–64)

Despite these internal conflicts, the CHP ended up channeling more state support to religious infrastructure. The Kemalist motto of the 1920s, “Our laiklik is not antireligious,” had become less of a pragmatic political statement with the primary purpose of containing Islam and had turned more to an advocacy of a civil religion tradition. On February 19, 1948, in a party meeting the CHP decided to put optional religion courses back in the fourth and fifth grades of primary school on school grounds after class hours (on Saturday afternoons) on the condition that parents would have to ask for their children to attend. The creation of the course books was given to the DRA under the condition that they would go through the approval of the Ministry of National Education. The ministry would choose the instructors of the religion course from among primary school teachers and, if necessary, from among local figures who were known to have the qualities necessary for instructing these courses; and the village institutes would start giving religion courses to their first year students so that they could become instructors in primary schools. Primary school graduates under the age of sixteen could also attend these courses. In November 1950 the religion course were added into the mandatory primary school curriculum by a Democrat Party government decree after consulting a commission of experts, and the terms of the optional course were changed from opt-in to opt-out. Now parents had to petition if they did not want their children to attend the course. The Democrat Party also continued the trend of investing in the DRA that the CHP had started late 1940s (see figure 5.1). The question of optional religion courses in the public school curriculum was the central matter for discussion with comparisons to European cases in the National Education Congress of 1953. Now I turn to the records of this congress.
The Debate over Optional Religion Courses in the National Education Congress of 1953

It is one of the forgotten moments in Turkey’s history that a university professor of law, Bülent Nuri Esen, opened a court case in 1950 against the teaching of an optional course on religion in primary schools. The State Council decided against the applicant on the grounds that the applicant’s claim that religion courses in public primary schools were contrary to the constitutional principle of laiklik was invalid. The decision published in the *Journal for State Council Decisions* in 1953 underscored that both the plaintiff and the defendant most of the time discussed laiklik and presented examples from Western law, theory, and practice. The decision continued with a claim on the importance of particular historical, social, and political causes in order to understand the meaning of the principle of laiklik and stated that the debates in the Turkish Grand National Assembly at the moment of the constitutionalization of the principle of laiklik in 1937 conveyed the correct meaning of laiklik; that is, “even the continuing presence of the DRA within the state budget has not been found contrary to the principle of laiklik,” and parliamentary debates on the (re)establishment of the faculty of theology had cast...
further light on the concept of laiklik, “a concept shaped by the inspiration of science and law, common to the world of civilization, and filtered by catastrophes and pains of our national history in order to carry a national meaning.”

The February 5–14, 1953, National Education Congress meeting became the stage for a long and rich discussion on this question of optional religion courses in primary schools. Bülent Nuri Esen was also a participant in the congress, while the decision of the State Council was still pending.

In the congress, Esen claimed that an optional religion and ethics course was against laiklik, and that Turkey had signed the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of belief and religion; therefore religion was a matter of private and not state education. The DP Minister of National Education responded by pointing out that even the United Kingdom’s Education Act of 1944 had stronger provisions for religion. The religion and ethics course in question was optional; therefore it was not against freedom of religion. The course was just a response to popular demand and needs, and if citizens had demanded to receive religion courses from the state as opposed to religious organizations, not having the course would present an initiative to religious organizations. Indeed, the minister continued, the United Kingdom’s Education Act put collective prayer in the beginning of the day in all (county and voluntary) schools (part 2, 25[1]), and religious instruction was given in all schools (25[2]). Parents could demand to have their children opt out from collective prayer or religious instruction or both (25[4]) in order to take another kind of religious instruction or no instruction.

Esen responded to the argument from a “social need” perspective (an argument very similar to the “law of majorities” argument in the French Third Republic) by refocusing the question on institutions. According to him, the question was not whether society wanted or needed religion; this was a social reality. The question was whether the state would engage in religious affairs. He also pointed out that the course had been instated by a decree without prior discussion by the National Education Congress. He stated that laiklik was Westernization, and “meeting this demand of citizens is not democracy. . . . Democracy has the same formula everywhere. One of its fundamental principles is that the state has to be laik.” He continued: “The real question is whether we can demand from the teachers [state employees] this task or not. . . . The teacher is somebody whose religious belief is not known, we cannot ask him/her to teach a certain religious belief. . . . If s/he does, the student loses freedom of conscience. . . . this kind
of instruction can only be given by a cleric [**din adam**],” and state principles of laiklik in education and impartiality (**bitaraf**) are violated (386–87).

A village teacher remarked that villagers sent their children to ignorant local religion teachers (**hoca**) for learning Islam because the school did not offer a course on religion, and that in some cases this also became a question of school attendance. He told the story of a student with poor school attendance because he was instead receiving local religious instruction. He inquired with the teacher and realized that the religion course was not being taught properly. He then convened with the villagers and their children and read them the book on religion assigned by the state, and they found it detailed enough and sent their children back to school (388).

The discussion split those who did not want religion in state schools, those who wanted it and wanted the class teacher to give it, and those who wanted it but did not want the class teacher to give it. The latter position required a change in the curriculum of teachers’ schools as well. One other axis of debate was the question of whether the optional terms of the courses would be opt-in or opt-out (391).

The legal advisor of the Ministry of National Education was also a participant in the congress and stated the position of the Democrat Party government. He emphasized both the belief and practice aspects of freedom of conscience, that the religion course in question was not required but optional, and that it simply provided an opportunity for the citizen to practice his/her right to freedom of conscience and religion freely and securely; an argument reminiscent of Nicolas Sarkozy’s **laïcité positive**. There was no forcing of wills, and therefore there was no violation of freedom of conscience. He remarked: “If we had required children to take a religion course without asking their parents for their opinion and vote, then one could rightly put forth the argument for the violation of freedom of conscience” (393). He continued to clarify that laiklik was a principle of social politics and not a legal principle, and therefore it was up to the parliament to define its meaning and practices according to the social conditions and needs of the country. Therefore,

although in laic states such as France, Switzerland, and even Belgium the church with all its organization stays outside state cadres and budget, laic and republican religious affairs personnel, organizations, and institutions in Turkey are just state offices covered under the state budget. And this situation is not seen contrary to laiklik in Turkey. . . . It is necessary to see this as natural. Because the state is not an abstract
thing outside life and reality. . . . As far as religion is concerned, its role
in the national community is beyond the need of explanation. Therefore it is impossible for the state to be indifferent to religion. For this reason, today no civilized country, except communist . . . derives the
meaning of antireligious from laiklik. (394–95)

The legal advisor for the ministry turned to the question of Western lai-
klik and made a counter claim on the West as an answer to Esen. He stated
that in principle laiklik meant the separation of religious and state affairs and
that state and religion were impartial (bitaraf) against each other, and the state
did not have a connection with any religious creed or principles. He explained
that the state made laws, did not ground itself on religion, and attempted to
respond to (religious) needs. Anything beyond this definition, according
to him, was political fanaticism, as one could see in the antireligious position
of states behind the iron curtain (395). However, one should not forget that
the legal advisor’s position was on optional Sunni Islam courses only and
therefore de facto fell outside the limits of an application of the principle of
institutional neutrality. He dismissed fanaticism both in the name of religion
and in the name of laiklik. “Laiklik is to separate the life of the state and
place of worship, and to put in between a harmonious border most fit to
national interests. This border cannot be hard and stiff. Like all moderate poli-
tics, according to the necessities of national life, it is natural that this [border]
also has to be soft and permissive. . . . Therefore in the laik countries of the
West, the school has not taken a position against religion” and leaves it to
the choice of the parents (396). He continued by saying that optional reli-
gion courses provide for the constitutional principle of equality, particularly
with non-Muslims (article 69, Civil Code article 266), for the exercise of a
right depends on the presence of the infrastructural possibility, and the legal
advisor pushed the same argument as Sarkozy’s laïcité positive:

Article 266 of the Civil Code says “decision for the children’s religious
instruction belongs to the parents.” But how will the father and mother
use this right given to them by law? A right is beneficial only if it is
used. The use of a right is dependent on practical means. The existence
of a right is meaningless if it cannot be used because of a lack of prac-
tical means. Therefore when the law grants a right to the citizen, at
the same time it orders the government and the administration to
provide for the means of the free exercise of this right. Indeed, for a
certain period after institutions educating religion hocas have been closed and religion courses in schools have been removed, muslim citizens, who represent the great majority of the country; 98 percent, have no means to provide for the religious education of their children. . . . In return, in the school of our non-muslim citizens, all along, religious education and courses are offered, and these citizens’ institutions for the education of clerics have not been discontinued. (396–97)

The legal advisor compared the government position and Esen’s position:

In fact, there is no fundamental difference between my and Professor Bülent Nuri Esen’s definitions of laiklik. Yet the difference is in the understanding of this definition, in other words, in its practice. And again, within the principles I have articulated, it is not contrary to laiklik to offer a religion course in primary schools. For example, if the curriculum at schools were made according to religious views or discussions, or students admitted or not admitted according to their position on religion, then it would be contrary to laiklik. (397)

The legal advisor to the Ministry of National Education was grounding the arguments on article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Other speakers also pointed out that many European countries that have signed this declaration offer religion courses in public schools. But the difference lies in the question of whether the state will provide the necessary infrastructure for the freedom. During the congress, European examples were presented in detail. The legal consultant to the Education Ministry went on to list examples from Europe. He covered Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Germany. He pointed out the presence of religion courses in each country’s state schools ranging from only in primary school to primary and middle school to all three, including high school and with an opt-out option. He concluded that if Esen was right, then these countries were theocratic and not laic (398–99). He left the case of France to last and spent relatively more time on it because he claimed
Esen seemed to be basing his argument mostly on this country. In France, he explained, state schools offer no courses on religion, but the state makes all the necessary arrangements for those students whose parents want to have religious education for their children outside of state schools, and Thursdays are an official holiday for that reason. On top of that, in France there is a huge religious education infrastructure competing in all respects with state schools, and the republicans’ struggle is to take students from church schools (400–401). In France the church is outside the state and strong; in Turkey there is no independently strong religious infrastructure.

Finally the legal consultant explained why the optional religion course started as opt-in but then was turned to opt-out:

In the 1949–1950 school year the number of students in fourth and fifth grades in primary schools was 414,477, and those who did not attend religion courses were in total 5,799 students, 2,797 muslims, and 3,002 non-muslims. . . . In the 1950–1951 school year, number of students in fourth and fifth grades in primary schools was 418,953, and those who did not attend religion courses were in total 3,035: 1,437 muslims and 1,598 non-muslims. . . . As you see, dear friends, although no one has been forced to take this course, the number of students who attend is close to 100 percent. And let me add, with particular concern, among the students who take the course there are also children of non-muslim citizens. . . . Don’t these numbers show clearly why initially a written statement was demanded from those who want to take the course, but later a written statement was demanded only from those who do not want to take the course? Instead of receiving close to half a million papers, we now receive less than 5,000 papers. (408)

An associate professor of psychology who also offered psychology courses in a theology department and was a member of the program commission that initially discussed the matter of a religion course gave a new direction to the discussion away from the comparative institutional debate and toward the purpose and possible results of giving a religion course. The state had decided to offer an optional religion course, now the question was what was the purpose and potential effect? To use religion in order “to assimilate the young generations to the context they live in, to bring him/her up with values filtered through national history and make her/him a beneficial part
[uzuv, literally an organic extension such as an arm or a leg] of our society” (411). Beneficial meant, he explained, “right, obedient, honest, moral,” and if this perspective on religion were accepted,

there is no contradiction between the goal religion aims at within the school curriculum, and worldly curriculum aimed at within schools. I see no difference between the good man accepted by religion and accepted by the world. Especially in the case of Islam, the last and best of all religions, I do not expect a quarrel with worldly matters. . . . The Program Commission also invited me. . . . There were long discussions on the matter. Our friends fully dealt with the matter and how to reach the goal in the shortest way? Yet there was a quarrel on whether it shall be optional or required, and we left without reaching a decision. But the matter is not on the question of optional or required. It is rather directly on the position of religion within the frame of the public program so that it only serves this purpose [of turning the youth into “right, obedient, honest, moral” parts of society], and this is precisely the gist of the proposal of the program commission. In fact, we said there [during the commission meeting]: Let us not quarrel here, this is a matter of expertise, let pedagogues, psychologists and clerics contribute. Let these experts go over especially the fifth-grade books . . . . In this decision we are in full accord in the commission. (412–13)

The professor continued reflecting on his teaching “psychology, pedagogy, and partly philosophy” in the “faculty of theology.” He pointed out that some contest the teaching of these course in a faculty of theology; “yet religion, in its essence, is an institution which always supports duties, services, and goals in the world.” He then referred to Europe:

European scientists point out that there is no contradiction between the natural sciences [ilim]—physics and biology—and abrahamic sciences; and that, in the most important issues, such as the proof of God [uluhiyet], biology and physics will also be of service. Clerics who teach biology, physics, mathematics in European universities prove this point. That is to say, our function is to save religious education from the hands of those who . . . are simple, ignorant, and abusive, and hand it over to the hands of the Turkish teacher. (413)
Another participant remarked that these religion courses “will also bring to faith those half-Muslims who claim that they do not lose Muslimness by not going to mosques” (422), and the director of education of one city stated that they would ask the Ministry of National Education to open these new religion courses in schools to all citizens (424). The director of a Greek (rum) lycée stated that religion is a worldwide phenomenon and that all children around the age of ten demand religious knowledge. Given the lack of literacy in Turkey, this service had to be given by the state schools, and he shared his own positive experience in the rum lycée (425–26). A director of a Jewish lycée also gave support.

A member of the commission for the review of democratic principles grounding education and instruction in the fourth National Education Congress (August 22–31, 1949) pointed out that the courses were optional for the students, but their teaching was required for the teacher (428–33). Another participant pointed out that the constitution guaranteed not only religious freedom but freedom of philosophical view and belief, and that the latter encompassed the former, and therefore the rights of the teacher were violated. He cited the British Education Act of 1944, articles 29–31, where the teacher was protected in public and private schools. He also pointed out that it was not that easy to carve out the moral aspects of religion from its other aspects. And he underlined that the curriculum emphasized application, so if this came up in the case of religion courses, there could also be demands for building places of worship in schools. The minister of education intervened at this point and remarked, “Of course not” (433).

By the time of the closing remarks, Esen had already left the congress. The closing remarks were by Peyami Safa, a prominent novelist and a Turkish representative to UNESCO, who concluded the discussion with a long speech that in sum stressed that the lesson from Europe was that religion and science went hand in hand (435–37). UNESCO meetings had concluded that teaching religion at schools was a must for general morals and education of the mind; teachers who did not want to teach religion should resign for not following the state program. Finally he listed the pedagogical moves that the program commission made in content, considering the age of the students.

This debate took place in the context of a court case, and the DP, with its lawyers, presented liberal arguments and mobilized European examples. However, the debate over the terms of optional religion courses revealed further vicissitudes of making liberalism compatible with even optional
religion courses. Utilitarian approaches to religion were able to penetrate liberal principles with less than visible minute institutional adjustments such as shifting the participation in the course from opt-in to opt-out. Moreover, the post–World War II turn of CHP and the DP away from a perception of European modernity as an integrated whole vis-à-vis the relation between state and religions (as was the case for the early CHP) and their rediscovery of Europe as consisting of varieties of institutional arrangements between state and religions exposing Europe as religious as well as a secular space are critical for current discussions on comparative modernities and the question of the traveling of European modernity. I will return to this point in the conclusion of this chapter and later in the concluding chapter. However, all this debate was taking place under the premise of the “law of majorities,” in the words of the lawyer, “Muslim citizens, who represent the great majority of the country, 98 percent,” the very premise that was also shared in the internal debates within the CHP at the dawn of the transition to a multiparty system and before; therefore the arguments were far away from neutrality or equality in state institutions. Furthermore, the organic political goal of raising “good citizens” through religion, which did not take center stage but was still pronounced in the background of the legal discussions in the congress, was an ongoing fundamental theme in the first multiparty parliamentary discussion on the future of the DRA.

The Question of a Separated DRA: The February 22, 1951, DRA Budget Discussion

On June 17, 1950, a DP parliamentarian, Feyzi Boztepe, put an oral question to the DP government. The text of his question, fully quoted in the newspaper *Milliyet*, demanded that according to laiklik, the DRA had to be separate (*mükstakil*) and autonomous (*muhtar*), and it, not the Ministry of National Education, had to arrange for religious education. However, Boztepe asked that the state budget for the DRA continue, for, he maintained, it is the duty of the laic and democratic state to economically protect theologians and the personnel who work under them, especially, in the context of twentieth-century risks that humanity would lose its faith and belief in the face of modern progress. He argued that loving life and humanity and being able to commit to higher ideals would be possible only through belief, and therefore we need to care for the morality of our children. However, he continued, it
was against laiklik if the Ministry of National Education organized religious education; therefore a separated and autonomous but state-funded DRA had to do it:

When the borders of laiklik are determined in this way, in other words, the interference [müdahale] of religion in state affairs or the reverse, the tutelage of the state over religion, is eliminated, the institution [müesseses] of religion finds the opportunity to develop separately in a mild-moderate environment, and it continues to do freely its spiritual [manevi] duty in social life. In its application, the percentage of responsibility falling on the government is large. It has to take the necessary... precautions according to law and order, in order to supervise [murak-abe] against possible fundamentalist [irticai] inclinations, and be attentive to the defense of reforms [inkulap] which belong to the whole nation... I kindly request from the Democrat government that has to come to power with the will of the nation to answer orally what it thinks on this extremely important matter.51

The government never directly answered this question, or at least I have not been able to recover such an answer in the records of the Turkish Grand National Assembly or newspapers of the time. The government expressed its position on the questions and issues Boztepe had raised during the DRA’s budget discussions on February 22, 1951, where the question of autonomy (muhtarîyet) for the DRA took up the major part of the budget discussion.52

More than twenty Democrat Party members, including Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, one CHP member, the only Nation Party parliamentarian, and one independent parliamentarian who used to be a CHP member took the floor. The independent parliamentarian was the first to speak, and he argued that state funds for a religion are antidemocratic and against laiklik:

SİNAN TËKËLIOĞLU. Laiklik means separating world affairs from other-world affairs, in other words to separate religion completely from politics, and to separate politics from religion. The second principle of laiklik is not to privilege any religion in the country. Now by taking the DRA within the State budget are we following this principle of laiklik, or not? If we are going to follow this principle of laiklik, there are two other religions besides Islam in this country: Christianity and Judaism. Therefore it would
be necessary to treat these religions the same and offer them a State budget. At the same time, it would be necessary to take the waqfs in their possession and give them to the Directorate of Religious Endowments. Currently, is a religion privileged? Yes . . . I defended this position ten years ago in the CHP congress; I even gave a proposal, but it was rejected . . . .

It can never be correct to discuss the Budget of the DRA as part of the State budget in the Grand National Assembly. . . . Let’s attach the DRA to religious endowments as it is for other religions and leave it free. If necessary the State can keep surveillance [murakabe].

A DP parliamentarian pointed out that “the protector of our inner being [manevi varlığıımız], the DRA, had been neglected and its personnel insulted [by CHP governments] until May 14 [May 14, 1950, elections],” and “freedom of conscience, and particularly that of Muslims, had been violated despite the constitution” (427); therefore it is necessary to be “grateful . . . for the increase in the budget” (428). But the ideal would be “to connect the waqfs built for sustaining religious institutions to the DRA and to let this autonomous institution in line with article 14 of the Democrat Party program,” and all this is also necessary for fighting “the enormous enemy . . . red ideology [communism]”:

AHMET GÜRKAN. Dear friends; look at America, the nations of the new world turn to religion for fighting communism. In 1938 northern European countries, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, come together . . . and decide that the religion of Islam is an institution to fight communism. . . . In America, from 1935 to 1945, the number of churches has increased from 199,000 to 253,000. . . . And about religious fundamentalism. . . . Revolutions [înkılaplar] made in our country are under the protection of our laws, and we can never, as parliamentarians, allow for religious fundamentalism. (Braço, applause.) . . . Friends, we all accepted the religious courses system introduced by the Ministry of National Education. . . . I wish that religion courses would also be given in primary schools that do not have the fourth and fifth grades. (428–29)

Some DP members found the budget increase insufficient and demanded a higher budget either to increase the wages for religious and administrative personnel of the DRA or increase the total number of personnel and religious publications, or to build infrastructure for the education of the

LAİKLİK İN KEMALİST TÜRKİYE  [167]
religion personnel so that they would be equipped to prevent religious orders *(tarikats)* from mobilizing and to eliminate the opposition between modern civilization and religion (428, 429, 435, 436, 444). There were also various references to Europe and the United States defending more state investment in religion infrastructure. One DP member added examples from Germany and the United States on “required” religion courses in primary and secondary schools. There were also multiple references to Churchill and Roosevelt, who “prayed in the church when the Second World War was starting” (442, 445), a comparative reference that was also stated in the CHP congress of 1947 discussed earlier. There were also more general statements on how the entire world was turning to religion against communism, particularly the rise of Christian democracy against communism in many European countries, and how Professor (Arnold Joseph) Toynbee had presented Islam as the way to fight communism when he gave a conference in Turkey in 1948 (445). One DP parliamentarian, Burhanettin Onat, stressed that “if communism is lightning, then the lightning rod is religion; if it is a poison, then its antidote is religion; if it is a microbe, then its serum and vaccine is religion” (446).

Another DP speaker, Yeredoğ Kişioğlu, stated that Turks are the leaders of Islam: “It is us, Turks who with our flag . . . we put on each continent made islam reach an exalted position.” He added, “After the acceptance of muslinness *[müslümanlık]*, what constitutes the moral and inner life of society is faith in God, Koran, and the sayings of the Prophet,” and he underlined that religion has to be protected from communism (430–31). There were frequent critiques of CHP policies. A DP member divided the CHP into two, with 98 percent belonging to the category who give laiklik the meaning of antireligiousness (455). One member gave the example of the critique Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver received from the CHP for arguing that the CHP should invest more in religion infrastructure (438). The DP member just quoted on the Turkish leadership in Islam advanced a critique of the CHP and underscored the impossibility of complete institutional separation:

*YEREDOĞ KİŞİOĞLU.* It is this party [CHP] who understood the principle of laiklik in the constitution as antireligiousness *[dinsizlik]* and caused the neglect and misery of religion, whereas the principle of laiklik is about letting religion walk and flow in its own sphere. . . .

How will we separate? . . . Since under today’s conditions, we cannot dismiss the institution *[müessese]* of religion—its principles, organization,
and budget—and let it go even after having created its institutions, this separation has to be in the form of an institution whose budget is managed and provided by the State . . . who chooses its own head . . . an autonomous institution. (431–32)

Another DP member pointed out the necessity of having the DRA appoint well-educated imams for fighting discrimination/racism within Islam, for example, against Alevi (434). Some wanted to have the DRA provide assistance for national education’s religion course (436), and some even wanted the DRA to completely handle these courses. Feyzi Boztepe, who had given the oral question on June 17, 1950, also took the floor. He built his argument for an autonomous but state-funded DRA on the premise of the “law of majorities” and on ethnographical claims (436). The law of majorities and ethnographical authority were mobilized on multiple occasions (see also 442, 447, 448) and were two forms of argumentation also common in the French Third Republic chamber deliberations documented in chapter 3. Boztepe claimed that villagers loved their religion and that “we are Turkish and Muslim,” suggesting CHP’s antireligiousness, and called for “reinforcement” of the “institution of religion” without suppressing the state budget. He read his stated question from June 17, with confidence that it had the government’s approval (438–39). One DP member reported villagers remarking, “Protect our religion, we do not want anything else” (442).

What ignited the interference of Prime Minister Menderes in the discussion was a comment by Osman Bölükbaşi, the only member of the Nation Party (NP) in the parliament. Bölükbaşi had been a DP member but later found the DP critique of the CHP insufficient and became part of a group that split to found the NP. The NP was dissolved in 1954, at which time Bölükbaşi founded the Republican Nation Party, which later turned into the Republican Peasant Nation Party (CKMP), to whose party program Ali Fuad Başgil had contributed, and which ultimately became the far-right National Action Party (MHP). Bölükbaşi made the following statement:

OSMAN BÖLÜKBAŞI. There are often claims that this political party or that political party has turned religion into a tool of politics. It is highly possible that within political parties, members who have not digested the party programs, running after daily interests, might have acted as such. There is only one way to prevent such actions. It is to deal with the question of freedom of conscience and religion in its entirety, not piecemeal, and once
and for all. . . . In order to have full and complete freedom of religion in this country, in our opinion, religion has to be regarded as a matter of religious community [cemaat] and separated completely from State influence. While insisting that freedom of religion exists in this country, we see that as State employees, the DRA administers religion. And there is a State budget for this administration. This is not compatible with laiklik. . . . Islam’s religious community must have the right to administer its own religious affairs. . . . If there is a worry that such an institution can become a means of religious fundamentalism, one can say, the government has the right to check all institutions to see if they are working according to their set goals. . . . Now . . . does the government see religion as an affair of religious community or a State affair? (440)

Prime Minister Menderes responded mainly to Bölükbaşı and to some other questions:

BAŞBAKAN ADNAN MENDERES. First of all . . . the amount of money spent on religious affairs is not limited to the official budget. . . . So many mosques built and maintained in the country, many imams, hocas working in villages are all possible with the opportunities provided for by citizens. Our citizens are free to donate, have mosques built, get a hoca, do their religious practices, and worship according to their creeds. . . . In fact, Osman Bölükbaşı has not expressed how the establishment of an organization of religious community or the presence of the DRA within the state organization is related to freedom of religion. Therefore I have no answer to give him. Bölükbaşı said that: Let us resolve the matter by giving freedom of religion in full and once and for all, rather than piecemeal. Does he contend that to resolve this matter in full and once and for all is to establish an organization of religious community? If we consider that the fundamental part [unsuru aslı] of the country is Turk and Muslim, it is not appropriate to talk about an organization of religious community, and we are of the opinion that it is not against laiklik to have a state budget [for religious affairs]. (441)

Religion as the only source of morality was repeated multiple times by many DP parliamentarians. Such statements were common: “A nation or individual without a religion has no morality . . . . man without a religion [dinsiz] is a coward, a man with a religion is brave. . . . The Turkish and
Muslim Nation which has reached its National Sovereignty and relies on his God is above all” (448). More radical statements were made at times, such as that all national calamities happened because of irreligion, nations without religion could not survive, and it is scandalous that the increasing number of cinema halls even surpassed the number of mosques in some localities (449). Another DP member pointed out that “if tight relation between religious affairs and State services are considered, we would agree that this important service [religious service] has to be maintained in its public character as a State service for some time longer, rather than handing it over to random hands” (450):

NECDET AÇANAL. Religions preach morality, therefore they are related to instruction and teaching of proper behavior. From this perspective, they are related to the services of the Ministry of National Education. Religions dispatch police that are only visible to religious persons, to places where the police cannot enter or see; therefore they are of help to the Ministry of Interior. Religions put penalties for crimes which the penal code cannot punish and promise rewards to those who do things beneficial to society; therefore they are helpful to the Ministry of Justice. (450)

The sole CHP speaker, Hamdi Şarlan, reminded the parliament that the religion course and other advancements in religion infrastructure were also initiated from within the CHP and said that he appreciated the DP government’s increase in the budget of the DRA. He also alluded to some earlier remarks by DP parliamentarians against particularly the CHP and remarked that under freedom of conscience in modern law, “no one could refer to another as irreligious [dinsiz]” (451).

Ali Fuad Başgil’s Support for the Religion Course and the Question of Separation for More Religion

One public intellectual who supported the moving of the religion course from after school hours into the school curriculum (with an opt-out option) was Ali Fuad Başgil, military officer in the First World War, educated in France, PhD in law from the University of Paris, CHP intellectual in the 1930s, and professor of constitutional law at Istanbul University. How he articulated this support and made it compatible with his critique of the CHP’s
laiklik and his defense of “separation” exposed a certain position also
defended in the budget discussions of 1951 and later by the CKMP in the
writing of the military constitution in 1961. I call this position, which was also
present in Third Republic France and expressed most explicitly by certain
political Catholics, “separation if and only if it contributes to religious life.”

It is crucial to situate Başgil as a public intelectual in context for an assess-
ment of his support for the religion course as well as for a critical descrip-
tion of the Turkish political scene. A brief look at his career as an organic
public intellectual belies his common portrayal as simply a conservative lib-
eral, and his trajectory also calls into question the dichotomy between Kemal-
ist laicism and political Islamism often taken for granted as an accurate
description of the Turkish political scene. Başgil was an organic CHP intel-
lectual and wrote in praise of the party’s statism and pragmatism in the 1930s.
In 1935 he even repeated Benito Mussolini (without citing him) in qualify-
ing the statism CHP should aim at, that is, “always within the state, nothing
against the state, nothing outside the state. . . . Here is the formula of statism
today,” and he often used organic analogies for describing society, such as “a
beehive.”55 Later Başgil became a fervent supporter of the Democrat Party.
He contrasted the relation between state and religion in the Ottoman Empire
and in Turkey, called the former a state under the religion system and the
latter a religion under the state system, and defended the third option of sepa-
ration of religion and state.56 Başgil participated in the Fourth National
Education Congress, August 22–31, 1949, and was a member of the com-
mission for the review of democratic principles grounding education and
instruction; the commission’s report had a totally moralistic understanding
of the workings of democracy.57 He was prolific as a public intellectual in
the 1950s.58 He had been a part of the group of legal experts and scholars
who convened at the demand of Osman Bölükbaş for the first time on
October 21, 1960, to revise the party program of the CKMP, which later
turned into today’s nationalist right National Action Party (MHP).59 In Janu-
ary 1961 he was charged with violating the law issued on December 12, 1960,
banning criticism of the Constituent Assembly when his article criticizing
it was published both before and after the law in question was promulgated,
and he was imprisoned.60 He did not participate in the writing of the 1961
constitution, although he was cited during the debates in the Constituent
Assembly. He was a Senate member after the transition to democracy in the
aftermath of the May 27, 1960, military takeover and actually a DP-supported
presidential candidate, but he was talked out of candidacy by the military
Başgil has also been mentioned quite often as a thinker inspiring the current government AKP.

While he was in prison in February 1961, Başgil received a letter from Ligue François de l’Enseignement. The letter asked him whether the statement of the Turkey correspondent to Le Monde that Başgil was at the forefront of the antilaic movement in Turkey was correct. Başgil responded as follows:

That I am against laiklik is maliciously false slander by my opponents who have not read my works. I am not against laiklik. I am against Godlessness (Allahsızlık). You, my French friends, know very well the difference between these two expressions. Because France, in its history and now, has lived and is still living both of them. I am convinced that as much as laiklik is necessary for a civilized country, Godlessness is as harmful and dangerous. I was educated in France. I learned from your big philosophers, such as Alain, Blondel, Chevalier, and your big statesmen, such as Edgar Quinet, that a Godless society will not have tranquility and rest. If my struggle against this big danger facing my country is a crime, then the real criminal is the one who taught me this: that is, France.62

Başgil argued for an independent Directorate of Religious Affairs in various works and newspaper articles. He proposed a law on the Directorate of Religious Affairs consisting of fifty-five articles in early 1950s. The first paragraph of article 1 of his proposed law states: “The Directorate of Religious Affairs is an institution with scientific, administrative, and financial independence and its institutional structure is as described in this law” (295). The head of the directorate is elected by secret ballot by an independent Council of Religious Affairs consisting of Islamic scholars (297). Article 2 strictly prevents anybody working for the DRA or in affiliated organizations and institutions from “entering political parties,” “engaging in politics,” or “interfering in the affairs of the government” (295). The state budget is suppressed (article 20), the directorate of waqfs merges with all its income into the DRA (article 4), salaries, and pensions of DRA personnel enter the discretion of the DRA bound by employment law (articles 5 and 6). The third article articulated the financial sources of the directorate:

The Directorate of Religious Affairs makes and approves its own income and expenditure budget by the means described in this law.
The income of the Directorate of Religious Affairs comes from religious waqfs in place since old times, and newly made religious facilities, donations, and monetary assistance. The expenditures of the Directorate of Religious Affairs are wages, construction and maintenance of buildings, copyright and translation, costs of religious services such as instruction and education. (295–96)

The reasons Başgil gave for a separated Directorate of Religious Affairs are scattered among his many works, and these reasons decouple many of the associations taken for granted in the study of religion and politics not only in Turkey but also in other contexts. Başgil clearly wanted to see religion more present as part of the Turkish social fabric, and this was a lesson he had learned from Europe, particularly Switzerland, where he had spent many years. In his memoirs, *Yakın Maziden Hatıra Kirintilan* (Remains of memoirs from the recent past), he wrote:

In Western countries, there are institutions and organizations in order to control [dizginlemek] unruly youth. At the top of this list is the church organization. This is such an institution that, unyielding and without getting tired, is on duty. In Switzerland, children are taken to church almost every day by their mothers until school age. After they start school, children are taken to church to pray and listen to the preacher twice a week under the guidance of their teachers. A kid who grows up like this from an early age on, even if he/she is tempted at a later age, the feeling of God he/she has received is always a controlling element.63

Institutional separation of state and religion for Başgil was a means to give religion the social role he so vividly described in the passage above for controlling youth. This relation that Başgil sought between the institutional and the social world was most apparent in his great appreciation for the Catholic Church for various reasons, one being its resilience to communism:

Here dear reader, the Catholic castle [referring to the church], which communism could not demolish in Europe, has been established in this way. This is the Catholic front . . . which Fascism and the armies of Hitler could not penetrate and therefore had to reconcile with. Today,
among the big religions, in terms of its worship places, organization, and personnel, the most impoverished one is, regrettably, the religion of Islam. We are not going to delve into the historical and sociological causes of this impoverishment here. Let it suffice to underline two fundamental causes. The most important one of them is that religion in the world of Islam has not parted with state control and declared its freedom from politics. According to us, the worship organization of Islam will continue to be impoverished as long as it is under the control of politics and serving politicians. Today, the only way for the worship organization of Islam to be set free from this condition and servitude is to achieve autonomy, even freedom, and in this way to part with politics and politicians. Today, the second fundamental reason for the impoverished state of the worship organization and personnel of Islam has to be sought in the constitution of the religion of Islam itself. The constitution of the religion of Islam is different from that of Christianity in an important respect: while Christianity is built upon the organization of spirituality [ruhanilik] and religious offices, in Islam there is no spirituality or religious office. In Islam, a sufficiently knowledgeable and experienced Muslim can lead the religious service. . . . Without doubt, this lack [of structure of religion personnel and offices] is a superior characteristic. In this way, Islam has attained the status of the most liberal among religions, and its followers have not been subject to the rule of Clerical class as has been the case in Christianity at different degrees during history. But, on the other hand, the experience of the past two centuries has shown that the lack of worship organization and religious office has created a lack of direction and proved to be a shortcoming.64

Başgil’s synthesis of institutional separation, religion as a social bond, and the European experience sometimes bordered on Orientalism. In 1962 when he was in Geneva he wrote in his memoirs: “Everything [in Geneva] is as I have left it six months ago. Everbody is working, smiling and living in welfare/comfort. Boredom of life and life pains is a punishment God has given to Eastern nations.”65 However, Başgil, who had committed to free religion from the influence of the state in the 1950s, welcomed state interference when it came to the question of the religion course in primary schools in 1948 and 1950 and defended the 1950 version of the religion course as part
of the school curriculum in the two articles he wrote for the newspaper Zafer. The first article started out with a contrast between the 1948 and 1950 versions of religion courses and critiqued the former:

Two years ago, religion courses were put in schools. But, in our schools where even music and physical education are obligatory [mecburi]—I guess it is in order to ridicule religion—these courses have been made optional [ihtiyari]. Naturally, it did not work. And parents rightfully mobilized. In the face of insistence from a majority of parents, today’s government, which is founded on national will rather than the heel of the boot, thought the issue through. Finally, with a decision of the Ministry of National Education, these courses were made obligatory.66

It is important to note here that Başgil, is referring as “obligatory” to the inclusion of religion courses in the public school curriculum with an opt-out option as opposed to the 1948 arrangement of having them outside school hours with an opt-in option. He responded to a critique of these courses that posited on the grounds of the freedom of conscience article in the constitution that in a diverse context of Turkish citizens consisting not only of Muslims but also of “Jews, Christians, Alevi, and Atheists [Allahszizlar],” the taxes of all cannot be used for the teaching of a certain religion in schools:

As [the state] cannot inculcate [telkin etmek] in favor of a certain religion without the consent of parents, it also cannot, under a veil of laiklik, inculcate irreligion. Because, let’s repeat, the religious education of the child depends on the will of parents, and it is their natural as well as legal right as stated in article 266 [of the civil law]. Let’s pay attention, according to law in democracy, the law that gives a right, puts the state on duty for making possible, and if needed providing for, the actual and secure use of this right. . . . Therefore, making such an education de facto possible—I am not saying provide for—and to help parents on this issue is the duty of the state . . . let alone being against laiklik, it is the state’s debt. Has the state paid its debt? For those who have not forgotten the insults and difficulties deemed proper for this country’s Muslim public for the past twenty or so years, it is not possible to give a positive answer to this question. . . . While Greek, Armenian, and Jewish citizens, in their own schools and institutions, could make their children benefit from the blessings of religious
education, on this side, a handful of self-interested persons who seized state powers have become an annoyance for our Muslim public and have deprived them from this blessing for years at all costs.

This is a necessity [şanıret] until an autonomous religious organization is established and private institutions which give religious instruction and education give their fruits. Necessities permit the forbidden [memnu].

Past de-infrastructuring and state interference became a justification for further state interference. Başgil continued the subject in a second article a week later in the same newspaper. Here he also took a comparative angle, addressed for the first time the question of opt-out, which was the main mechanism still keeping the new institution relatively liberal, and also answered the question of the state building infrastructure with the taxes of all going for a certain religion:

If like the Greeks, Armenians, and Jewish, [Muslims] also had their religious waqfs . . . an autonomous religious organization was at their disposal . . . if old religious education institutions demolished twenty-five years ago, had been replaced by modern . . . institutions and had given their fruits, and if the lack of religious education which nibbles away the essence of the current generation and spiritual depression were not reigning, I would never have defended obligatory religion courses in the laic school. Because, first of all, I am not convinced that the laic school can properly give a religious education. I am for saving religion from being a political commodity immediately and once and for all. Unfortunately, in the name of personal grudge and ambition, not only history but the future has been carelessly sacrificed, and for no reason a dark interregnum which today we only see in Soviet Russia has been created in the country. Under these conditions, the government cannot tell muslim parents: my schools are laic, exercise the right which the civil code gives you with your own means and opportunities as do non-muslim citizens.67

Başgil took a comparative angle:

Laiklik takes a meaning and is applied according to the historical trajectory and national necessities of each country. Laic Switzerland’s laic

LAIKLİK IN KEMALİST TURKEY [177]
Swiss citizens do not even think of finding this against laïklik. . . . I just read in the newspapers the other day, the laïc king of the United Kingdom, George VI, in his speech for the opening of the new parliament building, ended with a prayer, “Let God always bless this building and those who work in it.” Did we forget the “God is with us” engravings on the German soldiers’ bayonets and officers’ swords? . . . As I think further and understand better with time that hostility for religion in our country and those who created spiritual depression, in this regard, are influenced by Moscow rather than western civilization of rule of law. . . . If required religion courses are a first step to get out of this dead end, what happiness for our muslim people . . .

Will this requirement be against the freedom of conscience of parents? . . . If we require religion courses for all children registered at school, without distinguishing religion and sect, and without asking her/his parents, yes. But, if we apply the requirement only to those children whose parents desire, no.

Başgil explained that this is how it works in many Western countries, and after the will of the parents is recorded, “at a certain time during the week, they send the children to the religion institutions to which they belong. In fact, religion courses are not given in school and by schoolteachers. In these countries this is not necessary. Because Catholic and Protestant places of worship are so well organized for these services that they make state schools envious.”

He concluded by explaining how he would like these courses to be established in Turkey. The parents would be asked at the beginning of the school year. The children of those who do not want a course in religion would play in the schoolyard or have a discussion session under the supervision of a teacher. Those parents who wanted the course would then be asked if they simply want their child to attend or if they wish their child to take graded exams. He expressed that he was against schoolteachers giving these courses unless “there is a necessity” because this was against laïklik and there weren’t many schoolteachers capable of giving the course; “these courses would be beneficial only if given by believers.” Therefore, he continued, “as much as possible salaried teachers can be provided from among religious intellectuals, teachers (retired or working), state employees, military officers, lawyers, doctors. I even predict that among these persons there will be some who will
do this sacred task without wages.” He ended by responding to the critique that these courses and the budget of the DRA were from the taxes of all citizens, among whom were not only Muslims but also “non-muslims and Atheists.” His response was the “law of majorities,” that taxes were given as citizens, and not as Muslim, non-Muslim, or atheist citizens, and the budget was spent on public matters and, from the point of view of the majority, religion courses were a public matter.

Addressing Başgil’s defense of religion course in public schools is significant because his proposed law for a separated DRA has been taken as one of the earliest well-articulated expressions of institutional separation in Turkey; however, a simultaneous close analysis of the reasons he advanced for his proposed law and for the religion course attest that his position was not a principled defense of separation but rather what I call “institutional separation if and only if it contributes to a more religious society.” This position not only was present in some of the parliamentary discussions already covered but also had a continued presence at other moments, as we will see later.

The DP period ended with a military coup on May 27, 1960. The next critical juncture on laiklik came in the writing of the military constitution of 1961. This constitution turned the DRA into a constitutional institution and declared religious education and instruction to be optional. During the Constituent Assembly debates what ignited and drove the deliberation on laiklik was a proposal by the Professors’ Commission drafting the constitution explicitly challenging the premise of the law of majorities. The Constituent Assembly writing the constitution was made up of an upper chamber of military officers, the National Union Committee, and a lower chamber consisting predominantly of CHP members and supporters, and the CKMP.

The Institutional Politics of Laiklik in the Writing of the 1961 Constitution

During my interview on October 29, 2009, with Vakur Versan, one of the ten professors who wrote the first draft of the Turkish constitution of 1961, he recalled a conflict in the Professors’ Commission:

The constitution was finished. We made it. Outside, an army major is waiting. He will take it to Ankara. Muammer Aksoy hesitated for a
moment. I tell you historical matters that nobody knows, it is very correct that you record them. Siddik Sami turned to Muammer and said, “Muammer what happened? Something worries you.” Indeed, we have agreed and finished, we will give it to the army major, he will take it to Ankara, and there it will be approved and become the constitution. “Yes, I have, professor,” he said, “in the second article we say that Turkey is a laic state, and after, when we come to the section on the administration, we put in the constitution the Directorate of Religious Affairs, an institution that has nothing to do with laiklik and engages in religious affairs.”

This conversation took place in 1961, during the final session of the Professors’ Commission, between the head of the commission, Siddik Sami Onar, and a member, Muammer Aksoy. Onar’s book, *Idare Hukukunun Umumi Esasları* (Public foundations of administrative law), first published in 1952, defined laiklik as the institutional separation of religion and state and strictly pointed out that religious services are not public services and the existence of the DRA cannot be reconciled with the principle of laiklik; therefore its presence is better explained by political principles and regarded as a temporary “policing [zabita] precaution necessitated by the particular time and context of the revolution [inkılap].”

From the position of an academic observer of the contradictions of laiklik in 1952, in 1961 Onar had turned into one of the subjects who instituted such contradictions in practice. To Aksoy’s critical remarks cited above, he responded reaffirming what he saw as the still continuing particularities of the Turkish context:

Muammer, we discussed all these and reached this point, since you still have a concern, let’s go over it. Now, you are right, there are articles in contradiction with the statement of laiklik in article 2, but these emerge from the necessities [zaruret] of Turkey. . . . Even if today religious affairs are under the control of the state, we still cannot prevent reactionism [gericilik]. And if we leave it [religion] free, it will altogether act against laiklik. In Turkey, in this society, it is still necessary to keep it under state control.

In fact, the Professors’ Commission’s draft of article 12 (later article 19) on freedom of religion also had a paragraph on religious education (later
removed), which has been widely ignored in the literature. The paragraph read: “The State, with the condition of compliance with the essentials of the constitution, establishes public services and the necessary organization which will provide for the religious needs or religious education and instruction of the majority of the people or if necessary for those belonging to a minority religion or sect.”

The reference to minorities in this paragraph completely contradicted the original (1920s and 1930s) and the continuing “Sunni Muslim” and antiminority biases of the state position on laiklik. Figure 5.2 presents a flowchart of the writing of the 1961 constitution. In the records of the Constituent Assembly debates, the article on religious freedom is among the top three most debated articles. The other two are article 2 on the attributes of the republic, which also triggered a debate on laiklik, and article 38 on the nationalization of property. The debates in the lower chamber of civilian representatives show that it was precisely the paragraph in article 12 cited above that ignited the longest discussion on laiklik. In a long speech in the lower chamber, Professor Hızıf Velidet Velidedeoğlu argued in support of the paragraph that impartial institutional support to religions is the “real” laiklik and combined this institutional view with sociological observations:

The day when, although it is known that somebody is sunni, alevi, christian, or jewish or even atheist, nobody bothers that somebody; the day when those who go to mosque regularly are not belittled and in Ramadan, especially in small towns, restaurants are open and those who enter them are not frowned upon, there will not be the remains of an issue of being religious or not religious in this country. In other words, laiklik is not only the freedom of one religion, it is the freedom to belong to any religion or sect or freedom to not belong to any religion.

In his memoirs, Velidedeoğlu recounts that a CHP member approached him in private and criticized this speech in the lower chamber. The CHP member requested that the statement be removed from the records because he believed that it might be interpreted as antireligious by the people who already, in his opinion, equated the Constituent Assembly with the CHP and CHP with an antireligious position, and Velidedeoğlu adds that he disregarded that criticism.

Another argument in the Constituent Assembly, exceptional in context of the main themes in parliamentary and other discussions on laiklik covered...
in this chapter so far, was the defense of laiklik as nondiscrimination. It was put forth in defense of the Alevis, Armenians, and Greeks. Non-Sunni and non-Muslim minorities are often factored out in debates over institutions of laiklik, and their study constitutes a separate field. This empirical factoring out feeds the unquestioned references to Turkey as a Muslim-majority country and as a Muslim nation in the comparative and also often in the Turkey-specific academic literature and contributes to the reduction of the debate on the struggle over laiklik in Turkey to the dichotomy of

Figure 5.2 Flowchart of the Writing of the Constitution of 1961.
Kemalists versus Islamists. Even state documents, such as the ones analyzed here, if examined closely bespeak the presence of these minorities. In the lower chamber, Arslan Bora, the CHP representative from Tunceli, Hermine Kalüstyan, and Kaludi Laskaris defended Alevi, Armenian, Greek minorities, respectively. An article in the newspaper Dünya reported on July 26, 1960, “A Bizarre Application to the Constitutional Commission: ‘Alevi Group’ applied to the Constitutional Commission to have Alevilik recognized by the State,”76 and Cumhuriyet reported that a group of Alevis “asked for state recognition of their sects.”77 In my reading, the titles of these news articles misrepresent the demands of the Alevi group as they are listed in Dünya on July 26, 1960. The demands articulated fit much better under difference-blind liberal demands on state institutions rather than group-specific demands for the recognition of difference.78 Let me mention the four most relevant demands here: (1) to separate the DRA from the state administration, an institution that only defends the Hanafi denomination and looks down on other believers, but to spare funds for it from the state budget; (2) to give the right to convene and conduct religious ceremonies to the Alevi Bektaşı Muslims; (3) to stop the broadcasting of Koran readings on the radio, for even if these broadcasts may have started with good intentions, they end up being exploited by those who would like to see religion as a tool of politics; and (4) removal of religion courses from state-funded schools.79 Arslan Bora maintained a position of nondiscrimination and negative liberties rather than group recognition in his speech in the lower chamber on the religious freedom article.80 “Although we are a laic state,” he stated, “until now the Alevi group has been prevented from practicing its religious beliefs and worship . . . under prevailing [antidemocratic] laws [their] religious gatherings have been only possible in secrecy.”81 Later, during the discussions of the article on the DRA, he linked his conceptualization of laiklik as nondiscrimination to institutions:

Dear friends, in fact, since the affairs of the State and religion are separate, the DRA has no place in the constitution. Yet the DRA has today again taken its place in the constitution. But still, I would like to express . . . that the answer of the Constitution Commission to my question [here he is referring to the assurance that the commission gave on nondiscrimination during an earlier discussion] has made me and an [Alevi] group of ten million grateful. I salute you all and hope that
the answer of the Constitutional Commission will reflect in the organization of the DRA and the understanding of religious affairs.  

Hermine Kalüstyan had entered the lower chamber from the president’s quota, and after about two months as a member of the lower chamber, on February 19, 1961, she joined the CHP. Educated in mathematics in Paris, she taught math at Galatasaray High School and was the headmaster of Esseyan Girls High School. With differences in nuance, Kalüstyan’s defense of the Armenian minority also fell within a call for nondiscrimination. During the debate on the religious freedom article she made the following speech:

Paragraph 2 [of the article on religious freedom] provides for freedom of worship. If religious freedom is granted only to individuals, it is possible to deduce the conclusion that the individual carry on the religious worship by himself/herself. Maybe the religion of islam is open to such an interpretation. Yet in christianity this is not possible at all. The individual can pray alone. But the individual cannot conduct mass or sacrament. . . . There are close to a thousand armenian citizens in Ankara. They do not have a church. . . . They have applied for the establishment of a church. The answer they got was, “If there used to be a church in Ankara in the past, you could have practiced your religious ceremonies. You cannot build a new church.”

Upon this analysis, Kalüstyan proposed the addition of the following sentences to paragraph 2: “Religious groups conduct these religious services and ceremonies in places of worship and by the appropriate religion personnel.” These voices were left in the margins as far as the constitutional outcome was concerned. The understanding of military officers’ racism in the passage below is worth noting:

Even if we give up nationalism, will they give up racism? Let me give you an example: in the lower chamber when a representative from the Rum [Istanbulite Greek] race was asked “Are you Turkish?” he/she responded, “I am Turkish citizen from the Rum race.” When he got a response, “Don’t dwell on it, are you Turkish or not?,” he has responded again, “I am a Turkish citizen from the Rum race” but has not said, “I am Turkish.”
The brief episode between the two law professors, Aksoy and Onar, was at the beginning of the writing of the 1961 constitution, and a huge speech by a changed Aksoy in the lower chamber, as the spokesperson of the Constitution Commission (see figure 5.2), was at the end. Aksoy had totally given up his position in opposition. What he saw as contradictions in his earlier talk with Onar were now necessities:

When we take into consideration the circumstances in our country, we have witnessed individuals who want to give very general and dangerous meanings to laiklik, such as “State under the control of religion.” . . . Obviously laiklik does not mean being without a religion. However, if the concept of laiklik in the West, where a different social and political development and different conditions exist, is accepted 100 percent in our country, the result will not be positive but completely negative. Separation of religion and State is sufficient for laiklik in the West to reach its end. But for us it never serves the end. If religion, even when it is organized, is left outside the control of the State, because of particularities of this country that I will express in a short while, it can become a political force, and it has done so from time to time. Finally, in a country where the principle of general elections has been accepted but the level of literacy and education is very low, it is possible to take advantage of a momentary carelessness of the people and reach the goal of a “theocratic state.” In other words, in the final analysis freedom of conscience and the principle of laiklik can end altogether. It is exactly with this idea that some individuals . . . some so-called ulama . . . have come forth with the motto the complete separation of religion and State, and under the guise of Western-appearing “allegedly complete laiklik” have in reality wanted “to place the State under the complete control of religion.”

The excerpt above from Aksoy’s speech in 1961 is one instance in the Constituent Assembly where laiklik is explicitly and vividly reconceptualized as the state control of religion. A whole array of conceptualizations were put forth that fell defeated to that in Aksoy’s speech in one of the longest discussions in the Constituent Assembly. There were thirty-one speakers in total, and twenty-seven of them spoke long enough to offer a conceptualization in detail. Table 5.1 presents the array of conceptualizations and the number of speakers in each category.
TABLE 5.1
Conceptualizations of Laiklik in the 1961 Constituent Assembly Debates on Article 2, Article 19 (12 in First Draft), and Temporary Article 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Sociological (So)</th>
<th>Comparative perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separation (S), 5</td>
<td>Impartial state support (ISS), 2</td>
<td>Western (W), 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police (zabita) (P), 1</td>
<td>Non-discrimination (ND), 2</td>
<td>Non-Western (NW), 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control religious content and practice, 7</td>
<td>Utility of religion (UR), 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to ensure religious freedom, 1</td>
<td>Privatization of religion (PR) or differentiation of spheres (DS), 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put religion under the state, 2</td>
<td>Be at least egalitarian, if not laic, 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation, but the Turkish Context necessitates state involvement in order to . . . (SB)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: The major categories are not mutually exclusive, but the subcategories are. In other words, sometimes a speaker did offer an institutional and a sociological conceptualization and simultaneously put Turkey in comparative perspective, but no speaker, for instance, tried to simultaneously conceptualize laiklik as separation and impartial state support.
The discussions in the lower chamber cannot be treated as the main determinant of the resulting constitutional institutions, because, as diagrammed in figure 5.2, the military had the upper hand in writing the constitution and the lower chamber was dominated by the CHP in numbers. Although officially there were 74 seats in total reserved in the Constituent Assembly for two political parties, the CHP and the CKMP, the newspaper *Milliyet* reported that 142 out of the 272 total seats were held by CHP supporters. In his memoirs, Velidedeoğlu reports 225 CHP supporters. Kadircan Kafsh, a member of the CKMP and a newspaper columnist, reported 220. Yet the discussions offer an opportunity to study the relation among conceptualizations of laiklik, proposed institutional arrangements, and political ends.

Table 5.2 maps the different conceptualizations in table 5.1 onto the proposed state role vis-à-vis building religious infrastructure (education in religion, maintenance of mosques, training and paying clerics, etc.) in general. In a close reading of these debates one cannot miss that the struggle over religious infrastructure is much more at the center than the liberal question of the limits of state power over religious action and speech. Sixteen of the thirty-one speakers who did not necessarily agree otherwise explicitly established a relation between religious freedom and infrastructure. The question of infrastructure emerged in the debates from an emphasis on the dual aspect of religious freedom: the expression of ideas, on the one hand, and practice, on the other. The common argument voiced repeatedly in the lower chamber in defense of a focus on infrastructure was that religion was not only a matter of faith (*iman*) but also a matter of practice (*amel*), and practice needed infrastructure. This again recalls to mind Sarkozy’s *laïcité positive*, the views of some AKP parliamentarians, and the conceptualization of laiklik in the 2012 Turkish constitutional court decision defending AKP’s new education law. This struggle over infrastructure in the writing of the constitution of 1961 posed an important challenge to the liberal paradigm on state and religion relations, which focuses only on the limits of state power over religious expression and treats the question of infrastructure as exogenous. The institutional proposal of “State Builds Infrastructure for the Majority” (see table 5.2) was the institutional arrangement that was defended from within the greatest number of different conceptualizations of laiklik. Below I examine the multiple routes converging on this institutional proposal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mapping Conceptualizations onto Institutional Propositions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State builds some aspect of religious infrastructure for majority</strong> (SBIM)</td>
<td><strong>State builds some aspect of religious infrastructure for majority and minorities</strong> (SBIMM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious groups build their own infrastructure (RGBI)</td>
<td><strong>State-induced centralized independent religious infrastructure</strong> (SICIRI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Impartial state support) [2]</td>
<td>(Impartial state support) [2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Separation) (Western) [1]</td>
<td>(Separation) (Western) [1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Separation) (anti-Western) [1]</td>
<td>(Separation) (Western) [1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Utility of religion) [1]</td>
<td>(Utility of religion) [1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State-induced centralized independent religious infrastructure</strong> (SICIRI)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note</strong>: &quot;(Separation) (Western) [1]&quot; means one speaker conceptualized laiklik as Western and as separation.</td>
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Multiple Routes to “State Builds Infrastructure for the Majority”

Defending Religious Freedom and More: The Limits of Separationism under Infrastructural Constraints

The five speakers who conceived laiklik as separation were from the CKMP. Conceptualizing laiklik as separation was one of the two points common to all five speakers. The other point common to all five was that they all agreed that religious freedom requires guarantees against government coercion, and three of them linked this explicitly to the past where the republican elite had pursued antireligious policies. The last common point was that the five speakers clearly shared the goal of increasing the space for religion and found the emphasis on regime threat exaggerated.93 None of the five speakers addressed nonmajority religions; two of them explicitly declared Turkey a Muslim-majority country, and three defended a limit on speech critical of religion; therefore the observation of Tarhanlı that “the conservatives [in the 1961 Constituent Assembly lower chamber] have defended classical Western laiklik where state and religion affairs are strictly separated”94 does not present the full picture. Only two speakers, either through silence on the state’s role or as an expression of worries on state involvement, implicitly seemed inclined toward religious communities managing their own affairs. The other three explicitly welcomed a state role in some aspects of religious affairs. None of the five established strong links between the conceptualization of laiklik as separation and “the West” beyond the few explicit references to it as the “worldwide meaning” or “scientific meaning.”95 One of them, Kadircan Kaflı, actually had an explicit nationalist-religious anti-European line along with his conceptualization of laiklik as separation.

The general stance of the CKMP was stated by the head of the party, Osman Bölükbaşi, on October 12, 1960, while the constitution was still being drafted by the Professors’ Commission, in a lead article entitled “‘27 May’ and the Order We Expect” in the newspaper Kudret. The newspaper’s general position was succinctly captured in its motto written right under its title in the front page: “We defend real democracy and politics based on morality.” In the article Bölükbaşi explained that, “to render the order we expect permanent and fruitful, an appropriate moderate [vasat] and spiritual ground has to be made ready before anything else. In order to prepare this ground, morals and
right examples [hiba] have to be placed at the foundation of this order.96 A member of the CKMP in the lower chamber, Kâdircan Kaflı, in an article in the newspaper Tercüman on June 1, 1961, took this emphasis on morality one step further by putting morality even before the constitution: "The real foundation of democracy is morality, but other sources are also needed, [and] the first of these other sources is a perfect constitution."97 And in a newspaper article on the question of religious reform that he wrote on May 8, 1961, Kaflı argued that any state-led reform of religion is against laiklik as separation.98 Yet Kaflı was one of the three speakers who welcomed a state role in some aspects of religious life, and the one point common only to these three speakers among the group of five was the emphasis on the importance of infrastructure for religious freedom. The argument was that because religion was not only a matter of faith (imán) but more so a matter of practice (ame), religious freedom required sufficient infrastructure for citizens to practice.

Sadettin Tokbey, one of the five defending laiklik as separation and supporting an institutional proposal of a state-induced separation, made the clearest statement on the matter. "Freedom of conscience is a circuitous phrase,"99 he said. He differentiated between belief and practice and stated that "it is our duty to provide the facilities for practice for those who feel the need for practicing [religion]." He placed the emphasis on infrastructure when he stated that "to be able to use all these rights we need organization."100 These CKMP members argued that this was especially the case given how the infrastructure for Islam had been weakened by past Republican policies. The state had to take an active role in rebuilding that infrastructure. In the rest of the argument there were two positions. Two of the speakers defended the DRA as is. The other, Tokbey, wanted to see it separated from the state but retained a role for the state during the transition period to separation. The common point of these speakers was that the focus should be on institutionalism under infrastructural constraints only and away from the regime threat on which CHP members based their arguments.

\[\textit{Defending the Regime against “Unlimited” Religious Freedom: Stitching Up Institutionalism and Modernist Sociology with Historicism, Culturalism, and Expertise}\]

All speakers in the Constituent Assembly who offered a sociological conceptualization of laiklik were either from or sympathizers with the CHP. A
state role in regulating religious institutions was justified by an argument of sociological necessity, and the interplay of expertise, culturalism, and historicism in this justification was crucial. The head of the Constitution Commission (see figure 5.2), a member of CHP, offered a sociological conceptualization of laiklik: “Laiklik, as far as its historical trajectory [tarihi seyri] is concerned, is not only the separation of religion and the state. It is the separation of religion and science, religion and art, religion and law, and religion and economics.”

The widening of the question of separation from an institutional focus to a sociological terrain and bringing in “historicism” allowed institutions to be turned from an “end” to a “means” to reach a certain sociological condition. The speaker quoted above topped this sociological move with more contextual specifics. First, there had not been religious reform in Turkey, and second, as a result of the low level of education in the country, Islam had been intertwined with ignorance. He concluded by commenting on infrastructure to argue against any claim of contradictions of the Turkish state’s involvement in religious affairs and for the compatibility of laiklik with the DRA:

Since there are no clerical classes [ruhban simfları] in Turkey, obviously a few persons gathering together cannot be allowed to establish a religious organization. This is impossible. In addition, the persons who are given the duty to provide religion services are not spiritual [ruhani] persons. They are civil servants. In other words, they have neither holiness nor greatness. From this perspective, if we accept the Directorate of Religious Affairs as an administrative institution, then the [principle of laiklik in the] Constitution is not violated.

In a nutshell, the argument by the head of the Constitution Commission was that if the state did not build and maintain the infrastructure others would, and in the Turkish context of an intertwined low level of education and religiosity such decentralized formation of religion infrastructure outside the state would be a regime threat and, if materialized, would interrupt the historical trajectory of laiklik.

This historicist argument in defense of state involvement in religious affairs was given a new twist by the role of a European scholar in the closure of the Faculty of Theology in Istanbul University in 1933. Kadircan Kafli from the CKMP underlined the closure as an example of the CHP’s antireligious policies. A CHP member responded by arguing that the closure of the Faculty
of Theology was not a result of a Republican antireligious policy but rather just the result of historical development (tarihi tekamül), which Emin Soysal from the CHP defended with the European expert’s report on the state of Istanbul University.104

Atatürk did not close the Istanbul Faculty of Theology. . . . Then, in order to reform Darülfünun [Istanbul University], an expert with the name Professor Malsh was brought in from Europe. If you read the report this person submitted, you will understand. . . . Professor Malsh says in the report he submitted to the state: “I cannot have a say in the direction the religious institution of a nation will take, but this is the situation: it [the Faculty] has four students and approximately forty professors.” . . . That is to say, on its own, as the result of a historical development this institution has been closed.105

On other occasions, historicism sometimes was preceded by outright denial of the contradiction the DRA as an institution posed for “separation.” In this regard, Professor Bahri Savcı’s position that he rearticulated through the writing of the constitution was quite interesting. He was one of the ten professors who drafted the 1961 constitution, and later he entered the lower chamber as an independent from the professional group quota for universities. In a written statement he had attached to the Professors’ Commission Report, he strictly opposed religion courses in public education, and part of his argument relied on a claim of “Turkish difference,” articulated more as culturalism than as historicism:

One possible argument for the defense of religious education in public schools is that religious education by the state can help in fighting against reactionism [gercilik]. This argument is wrong. The only way of fighting backwardness is to realize positive science education. . . . The characteristic of the religion of Islam is to infiltrate the life of the State. The religion of Islam will enter through the gateway opened by this paragraph of article 12 [the paragraph that started the discussion, quoted above] and will aim at first controlling “the State” and then the whole society.106

However, in his speech on laiklik in the lower chamber, Savcı adjusted his position. He ended with an outright denial of the contradiction between
a state-funded DRA and laiklik and followed with contextual necessities. He disqualified this state-funded institution as a public service and made accommodating remarks on religious education:

And finally, laiklik is the following: religion is not a public service. . . . This is scientifically true. In this respect, our constitution as a whole and in its article 19 is completely laic. Yet a question will remain in the minds of the speakers who took the floor here . . . : if laiklik is that, then what is the place of and reason for the Directorate of Religious Affairs? The constitution mentions education in religion. What does that mean? Aren’t these in contradiction with laiklik? In my judgment the answer to these questions is “no.” Both education in religion and the Directorate of Religious Affairs are simple ways of policing [zabta]. Because the Directorate of Religious Affairs is not the organization of a State religion or the organization of a religion within the political organization. . . . In any case, there is no state religion in existence. . . . Because our constitution . . . does not take religion to be a public service, the Directorate of Religious Affairs is not an institution established for this purpose. The Directorate of Religious Affairs is only for gathering the disordered religious affairs in society, centralizing and canalizing them. In other words, this is not the instituting of a public service but the providing of an order. . . . In addition, article 19 mentions education in religion. . . . But this education in religion, because the State does not have a religion, this education is not the indoctrination of a State religion. And because there is no religious organization in the State, this is not an education teaching the principles of this organization. For in our laic society, material [beşer] needs are satisfied by material means.107

Toward the end of his speech, Savcı turns toward particular arguments about Islam to articulate the “Turkish difference” in between culturalism and historicism:

This is the situation: the Religion of Islam is overtaken by superstition. And there is an illogical and unreasonable system of religious education. Now, it is not contrary to laiklik to show religion in its pure principles to the children of those who ask for it in order to save the religion of islam from superstition and the à la tunca [oriental] system
of education. The education in religion in article 19 is not about conveying a state religion or to arrange all of our political, social, and economic life according to religion, but only to teach properly to the children of those who ask for it the pure principles of religion saved from superstition. Along with this situation, if we also remember the rules of no religion in the State organization and taking religion out of the State organization, what we have is a simple policing by the State for the sake of ordering a disordered field.  

Soon after came the “Turkey is different from the West” speech by Muammar Aksoy sealing off the discussions in the chamber cited in length above.

**Utilizing Religion: Building Religion Infrastructure for Governance**

During the deliberations on article 12, a utilitarian approach to religion was articulated by two speakers as a conceptualization of laiklik. A military academy teacher who entered the lower chamber from the National Union Committee quota started his speech by stating that laiklik means that religion stays under the protection (himaye) of the state, but his articulation went way beyond that:

The only institution spread all over the country . . . and which can gather citizens under a roof is the institution of religion. . . . If we can benefit from this institution properly, I believe that it will play a huge role in our national development. Because our national development does not only depend on material. For sure, it is set that development does not happen only with building factories. In parallel, there is the necessity to rise morally. . . . The principle of laiklik is still understood by the public as if it is a principle bringing irreligion.  

In line with his conceptualization of laiklik, the military academy teacher proposed turning optional courses on religion and morality that existed at the time into required courses and adding a new paragraph to the article on religious freedom that defines religion as an institution supportive to national education, a proposal that explicitly violates the differentiation of spheres (1358).
Another member of the lower chamber, who also was from the National Union Committee quota, articulated a utilitarian approach to religion as well. He underlined the problem as ignorance (cehalet) and articulated a utilitarian approach, with a focus on the moment of subjugation of a citizen:

Why shouldn’t we raise valuable clerics? It would be a big mistake to leave the religious education of this country in the hands of the ignorant. As you all know human beings have desire and need to believe in a higher being. This is unstoppable. The inner commands [manevi hukuk] of religion are laws of morality. Human beings do not encounter the police and gendarme at all times and places. That the fear of God is sovereign in hearts and souls is to be desired. The only reason for the drastic difference between advanced Western countries and the situation at home is that they have culture and we have ignorance. This cannot be denied. If we do not attempt to eliminate this ignorance and raise valuable clerics, it is not possible for the cause of laiklik to be resolved in a reasonable and firm way. (1446-47)

He proposed that the following paragraph be added to the article on religious freedom: “To give education and instruction in religion for the purpose of fighting religious ignorance is permitted under state inspection [murakebe], subject to the condition that individual freedom of conscience is not violated.” One comparison he pursued was with France:

In 1905 while in Paris for my education there was a grave incident in the French parliament. One of the Rightist Clerical Party members, Svetov, slapped War Minister Andri in the parliament. This event had a great impact on me. I wanted to learn the reason. Citizens and some Frenchmen I knew told me that there was a lot of tension between the two parties because the right-wing parliamentarians were convinced that the left-wing radical party wanted to interfere in the affairs of the church and religion. Furthermore, according to the right-wing party the radical government was collecting information on military officers who continued attending church and Sunday sermons. Just like it was here during the time of Sultan Hamid. . . . But then in France there wasn’t a laic rule. But not so long after, the separation of church from the state was decided and put into practice. And France pronounced...
itself an officially laic state. . . . Right after the decision taken by the Combes Cabinet, in France laicization came about. The year was 1905 or 1906. . . . Except [for] some demonstration[s] there was no upheaval. There was still a clerical party in the parliament. The party had a newspaper called *La Croix*. The French adapted to this new situation right away. This is the most significant point. The French obeyed the new law. They have religion schools, faculties educating men of religion, in other words they have higher education in religion. . . . This is the other important point. (1445)

Another comparison was with the United States: “What did I see in America? In Washington in some streets I saw street signs “To Church.” I saw a priest pray in the American parliament before each session. Despite all these, in America nowhere is religion made into a tool of politics” (1446). He concluded that “the only reason for the drastic difference between advanced Western countries and the situation at home is that they have culture and we have ignorance” (1447).

The Institutional Politics of Laiklik in the Writing of the Constitution of 1982

From 1970 until the military takeover on September 12, 1980, Turkey had thirteen governments. During this period, the average life of a government was 9.2 months. The news reported armed conflict or bombings every day in the late 1970s, and as the decade was coming to an end reporting of individual violent events was replaced by headlines on bombings and armed conflicts in the plural. To get the exact arrest and death toll of a military regime is quite difficult. For instance, Eric Zürcher reports 11,500 arrested in the first six weeks of the military coup in 1980 and 30,000 by the end of that year; 122,600 a year after the coup. This much is well emphasized in standard accounts of the 1980 coup. What is much less emphasized and is overshadowed by the “anarchy and terror” account is that with Süleyman Demirel’s minority government’s January 24, 1980, decisions of devaluation and a reduced state role in the economy (all measures formulated by the prime minister’s secretary Turgut Özal, who later founded the Motherland Party and won the first postcoup elections), strikes spread to all sectors. The government’s strategy of postponing strikes was proving ineffective and
collective bargaining attempts were failing. By September 6, 2010, 53,350 workers were on strike after not being offered collective bargaining. On September 7, 1980, the newspaper *Milliyet* reported that attempts at collective bargaining in the textile industry had failed and strikes were expected to expand. By September 10, Demirel’s minority government (November 12, 1979—September 12, 1980) had already declared sixty-nine strikes illegal since the beginning of the year, more than twice the number in all of 1979. On September 10, 1980, *Milliyet* reported that 80,000 additional workers were ready to strike. On September 11, one day before the coup, the strike in the glass sector had completed its hundredth day. The September 6 Konya demonstration of Necmettin Erbakan’s National Salvation Party and the armed conflicts and bombings that are often highlighted as the main reason for the coup and facilitate the justification of the coup as maintaining “order and laiklik,” overlook the level of strike activism that preceded the coup. Indeed, the first deed of the National Security Council when it took over on September 12, 1980, was to dismantle the political parties and the second deed was to dismantle two syndicates, the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers’ Syndicates (DİSK) and Confederation of Nationalist Workers’ Syndicates (MİSK). The third task was to dismantle almost all associational life. The total number of syndicates dispersed in the first week of the military regime by the National Security Council was 703 (471 of them were independent). This frontal attack on syndicates is exactly the same dynamic as in the Latin American coups. The state-prone TÜRK-İŞ syndicates were the only ones reopened. On November 6 the Work Ministry was rewriting the law on collective bargaining strikes and lockouts for a single syndicate. The solution to the problem of collective bargaining came on November 23; it would be solved by a method of “exemplary contracts” (*emsal sözleşme*). In other words, rather than bargaining with workers’ representatives, the Work Ministry would decide on the current terms of work through an evaluation of past examples of collective bargaining documents, allowing only TÜRK-İŞ to partake in this decision process. Most coups in Latin America struck left-wing governments and left Christian democrats in place; the Turkish trajectory looks exactly the same. Neither the shorter time of the military in power in comparison to Latin American coups nor the media cover-ups could hide the level of military violence, particularly in Diyarbakır Prison no. 5, and in the sporadic right-wing attacks such as the ones in Çorum, Fatsa, and the Massacre of Maraş. However, it is striking that the only news reported in *Milliyet* on the coup and Diyarbakır
between September 1980 and September 1983 is coverage of a couple of activists in the Britain who suggested that there were deaths in the Turkish prison, while the *Financial Times* reported hunger strikes in prison on June 4, 1982.127

Significant religious communities were less touched by the coup, partly because they shared the anticommunism of the Kemalist military officers. After the September 12, 1980, coup, one leader of the Nur community, a denomination within Islam, came out publicly supporting the military regime and even wrote a letter to the head of the National Security Council (MGK) asking for more space in society for religion.128 The largest wing of the Nur community was a group called Yeni Asya. The group had supported all those political parties who stood against past military coups.129 However, a front-page article entitled “The Voice of Our Military,” published in the newspaper *Yeni Asya* on February 10, 1971, and written by the lawyer of Said Nursi, founder of the Nur community, was explicitly in favor of the military regime calling on the military against the left.130

Fethullah Gülen, one current religious leader emerging from within the Nur community, had then split from the Yeni Asya group; however, some of his mosque sermons and lead articles in his group’s journal, *Sızıntı*, widely accepted to have been written by him under a pseudonym, shared the same promilitary line. *Sızıntı* published two endorsements of the military, one right before the coup in June 1979 and the other right after, and as late as 1995 Gülen still had not criticized the military government of 1980–1983.131 In the June 1979 piece entitled “Soldier,” the soldier was depicted as the fore-runner of “civilization” and “prosperity” “with its conquests and the following culture raids.”132 Starting with praises of the “military profession” as “of high esteem both at the level of God and the level of the people” the article ended with a section on “born soldier nations” alluding to the Turkish nation. In his piece right after the coup he continued to praised the military takeover and concluded, “Salute one more time to the soldier who came to our help fast where our hope was exhausted.”133

Gülen had dispersed a nationwide boycott of the High Islam Institutes with his fatwa “there is no boycott in Islam” in 1977, and in some of his sermons before the coup he had asked, “Has the Prophet ever marched or chanted slogans?” In a sermon in 1980 he called on the public to turn in “anarchists and terrorists” to the state; if not they would be responsible to God: “Let the secret service hear, let the police hear, let the military hear, let the prime minister hear, let the president hear. If these traitors shooting at
the police and the military do not receive the necessary punishment in court, neither the state nor the nation will remain.”

Gülen’s biographer underscores that for Gülen, “despite having the disadvantage of destroying the democratic system,” the coup eliminated the possibility of communism, which he saw as a higher danger. On the required religion courses put in the military constitution of 1982, his biographer reports him saying that military “revolutionaries [İhtilalci] did what republican governments could not do.” A graphic representation of a military and Gülen movement agreement on antileftism was a drawing in the May 1989 issue of the journal Sızıntı of a young man sitting on a chair in a cell with hands and feet tied, head tilted to the side, clearly semiconscious or unconscious, and an interrogation light hanging over him; he had obviously gone through torture. Toward the top it read: “What if it is also closed to the beyond . . .?”; toward the bottom it read: “This life which ends here with separation in pain and migration to foreign lands, could have at least been open to the beyond! What if it is not.” Rusen Çakır notes that here Sızıntı questions the conscience of the tortured and has nothing to say on the torturer. This cartoon is a commentary on the communists’ rejection of the spirit and of religious morality, tracing the torture to this rejection and endorsing the assessment that communism is a threat and that the military’s response is the proper way to deal with that threat.

The Military Pushes for “Religious Morality,” and the Emergence of Islamist Civil Society

The coup itself was an enabling factor for the rise of political Islam both by eliminating the organizational structure of its potential rivals from the left and by directly promoting religious morality as a characteristic of the “good” citizen and the solution to the precoup “crisis.” The reorganization of civil society by military violence was followed by military policies establishing Sunni Islam as the cement of society. This opened new paths for religious communities after the coup in the economy, the state, and civil society. Three concrete military acts of religio-cultural policy were the First National Culture Meeting, convened in October 1982; articles 24 and 136 of the 1982 constitution ratified by referendum on November 7, 1982; and the opening of a preacher and prayer leader school (İmam Hatip high school) in Tunceli in 1985.
The officially stated reason for the opening of the İmam Hatip high school was anarchy, terror, and the ethnic makeup of the region. However, this promotion of religious infrastructure was in fact part of the larger military project of investing in national culture, with Sunni Islam as its major element. General Kenan Evren opened the first National Culture Meeting on October 23, 1982 with the statement, “Civilization is international, culture is national.” He offered a conceptualization of culture “as a combination of developments in a society’s spiritual, aesthetic, inner, social, and intellectual planes . . . most appropriate for the goals for which the Culture Meeting has convened.” This practice of putting Sunni imams in Alevi villages was not only a military regime policy; it existed before the coup and was continued by the military regime. It was part of the origins of the Turkish Republic and is still the case today, as discussions in parliament on a new law for the Directorate of Religious Affairs in July 2010 attest.

Mobilizing religion as the “cement of society” was expressed most vividly in articles 24 and 136 of the 1982 constitution. Article 136 reads: “As an agency of the general administration, the Directorate of Religious Affairs fulfills the duties indicated in its special law in compliance with the principle of laicism, and remaining outside of all political opinion and thinking, and having as its goal national solidarity and integrity.” Article 24, paragraph 4, turned the optional religion and ethics courses in primary and secondary education to compulsory: “Education and instruction in religion and 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.”

The debates in the Constituent Assembly for the 1982 constitution were full of formulations that the socioeconomic crisis of the 1970s was a moral crisis that could be solved with religious education. The constitution was drafted by a Constitution Commission, discussed and a first text finalized by the Consultative Assembly, evaluated and necessary changes made by the National Security Council, and ratified by a referendum. Some statements from the Consultative Assembly working on the draft constitution before it was sent for approval to the military were: “Economic crises can be overcome in a short time by taking measures; however, moral crises are not like this. Many nations have been erased from history as a consequence of moral breakdown.” “Instead of . . . Lenin, Mao, and Castro let’s teach the Turkish child his/her religion in a real sense and under the license of the state within
the principles of Atatürk.” “There is no minority in the Turkey of Atatürk, there is [only the] citizen.”

The debates in the Consultative Assembly and the National Security Council present important clues to the politics of the 1982 constitution; however, the procedures set for writing the constitution were in the final analysis window dressing. General Kenan Evren relates in his memoirs some of the events that had taken place behind the façade of the openly stated procedures:

We had diagnosed many malfunctionings emanating from the [1961] constitution and we had ordered the General Secretariat of the National Security Council to prepare a constitution draft that would remedy these malfunctionings. The general secretary was taking the matter close to heart and various experts were working on the task. Even before the Consultative Assembly had started working toward a constitution [draft], a constitution draft was almost ready at the General Secretariat. Because we had plenty of time ahead of us, we did not address the matter of the constitution. Anyhow, it would not be appropriate for us to start working on the constitution draft we had prepared before the preparation of a constitution [draft] by the Consultative Assembly. Only when the sessions of the Consultative Assembly had started and articles were being ratified by them, their ratified articles were coming to us, and in order to save time, we were holding our meetings over these articles unofficially.

Article 24, paragraph 3, was drafted by the Constitution Commission as “Education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Education and instruction in religion is a matter of the will of individuals; in the case of minors it depends on the will of their lawful representatives.” It was changed by the Consultative Assembly to “Education and instruction in religion and ethics is compulsory in primary and middle schools, and it is conducted under the supervision of the state. The attendance of those individuals, who do not belong to the religion of Islam, to the courses on religion is voluntary” and finalized by the National Security Council as “Education and instruction in religion and 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 instruction shall be subject to the individual’s own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives.”

Two members of the Constitution Commission had already found the draft of article 24 insufficient. These two members maintained that instead of stipulating optional religious instruction in public schools, article 24 should have made religious instruction compulsory. One of them was İhsan Göksel, who was also a member of the National Security Council. A civilian member of the Constitution Commission also expressed as his main concern with the initial draft of article 24, the absence of compulsory religious instruction in public schools. Tevfik Fikret Alpaslan argued that “education in religion and morals should be mandatory in primary and secondary levels of instruction,” because “a citizen who possesses knowledge of religion and morals is always beneficial for the country.”

At the August 21, 1982, meeting of the Consultative Assembly, owing to an excessive number of proposals (fifteen) on article 24, the head of the Constitution Commission, Professor Orhan Aldıkaçtı, suggested that this article be rewritten by the commission in light of these proposals before being submitted to discussion in the assembly. When the article was brought for discussion, two modifications were noticeable in the paragraph on education. The assertion of the state supervision of religious education was made more explicit by the addition of the phrase “Religious and moral education and instruction is mandatory in primary and middle schools” with an explanation for the condition of “minorities,” meaning non-Muslims: “The attendance of individuals, who are not members of the religion of Islam, to religion courses depends on their will; minorities are protected under laws specific to them.”

With this new formulation, members of the assembly who felt their proposals were accommodated withdrew them; yet there were still some remaining objections. The first proposal discussed in the assembly was signed by seventy-four members and was in favor of the paragraph asserting state involvement in religious education. On behalf of the signers, Nurettin Ayanoğlu thanked the commission for including the paragraph and explained, “Atatürk has said that ‘the nation will learn its religion in school.’” He continued, “religious education and instruction, which will be conducted without state school and state supervision and control, will by time develop in the direction of the views of some religious orders [tarikats] and religious sects [mezhep]; and this condition will definitely damage national unity and togetherness [milli birlik ve beraberlik]” (272). He identified the cause for the
increase in secret religious teaching contrary to regulations as the insufficient instruction in Islam in state schools. In other words, teaching Islam in state schools would eliminate private forms of teaching religion, such as by religious orders (272, 278). All this was necessary to prevent religion from becoming a means of politics (281–83).

Ayanoğlu continued, on behalf of all who signed the proposal in favor of compulsory education, and asked for further clarity on the article as drafted by the Constitution Commission. He pointed out that a clear distinction had to be made between legitimate and illegitimate involvements in the sphere of religion. He defended the part of the proposal that advocated specifying the main textual sources of religion. According to Ayanoğlu, “activities with the intention to teach religion from its main sources” should be legitimate while “propaganda-like” teachings and activities that aim to ground the fundamental order of the state on religious principles should be considered a criminal offense (272).

The addition in article 24 of the phrase qualifying the textual sources for teaching Islam was rejected, but Ayanoğlu had voiced one of the main tasks that religious education was put to: to solve the problem of societal fragmentation. This position had wide support in the Consultative Assembly. The typical argument rested on a conception of religion as national culture; religion had to be mobilized in order to protect national culture against societal fragmentation (274). Religion, on the one hand, was the cure against excessive pluralism, and on the other hand it was an alternative to a leftist political agenda (300, 302); therefore it was institutionalized to be a part of the content of social morality and national culture.

The Republican offense was not only against decentralized and radical forms of religion. It was a more general attack on minorities (295, 304–6). As noted in chapter 3, the French republicans at the end of the nineteenth century did not attack minorities as such but only as radical religious sects. The definition of religious teaching as national culture summarized above was to serve the end of a more homogeneous and therefore more governable population at the expense of excluding a constitutional acknowledgment of minorities in Turkey. Fevzi Uyguner, for instance, argued against the use of the term “minority” in the draft of article 24: “There is nothing called a minority in Turkey,” he asserted, “anyone who is related to the Turkish State by ties of citizenship is Turkish” (275).

There were some alternative voices in the assembly as well. For instance, Kamer Genç agreed with the others on the social necessity of religion but
argued that rather than public teaching of religion with compulsory courses in state schools, he opted for instruction in the private sphere, within the family (276). Public instruction in religion, he argued, was in contradiction with the laiklik of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which, according to Kamer Genç, meant separation of the affairs of religion and state. He more explicitly pointed out that at times religious teaching could contradict positive science (299) or the civil code, a situation that would undermine the legitimacy of the state. Contrary to the collective report of the Constitution Commission and members of the Consultative Assembly who supported this report, Kamer Genç saw the separation doctrine as incompatible with teaching of religion in state schools. Asım İğneçiler criticized Kamer Genç for misunderstanding Müslümanlık (Muslimness):

In Islam, in the Kur'an-ı Kerim, in hadis147 as we understand it, there are no religious sects. Therefore, here we did not come to implant the seeds of religious sects. If laiklik, as articulated today, had been against the principles [the six arrows underlying Kemalist ideology] of Atatürk, then religious education and mosques would not have been so highly valued by Atatürk and in the times just after him. (277)

After questions to the Constitution Commission, the head of the commission, Orhan Aldıkacılı, introduced İhsan Göksel Paşa, a member of the National Security Council as well as a member of the Constitution Commission, to speak on behalf of the commission. Göksel pointed out that Islam is a unifying religion, and that religious sects had been formed as a result of the flourishing of multiple interpretations after the death of Muhammed. He advocated a peaceful cohabitation of the spiritual forces of nationalism and religion:

Laiklik never means being without a religion [dinsizlik]. Laiklik means that affairs of religion are not mixed into affairs of state and into politics. Religious instruction and education is never against laiklik. We will learn our religion in its real aspects so that those ill-intentioned men of religion who would like to shake our loyalty to the principle of laiklik cannot fool our nation and cannot guide us to paths outside Islam [Müslümanlık]. If we make an art course, a handcrafts course, a music course required in the curriculum and not teach our nation our religion, which is among the greatest spiritual powers, then we can see that
the attempt to stay erect just by nationalism is like a man who has lost a leg and is attempting to walk.

Religion will be taught, but its practice will not be enforced. If its practice is enforced, then that is against laiklik. (280)

The National Security Council

The deliberations in the National Security Council over the constitution draft of the Consultative Assembly started on October 18, 1982. A constitutional commission formed from within the council had already revised the draft. The head of this commission, Judge and Major General Muzaffer Başkaynak, defined the role of the military at this historical juncture in his introductory speech:

To save the State, which has found itself on the verge and even within a civil war, the Turkish Armed Forces, who always believe in democracy, had come face to face with its unchangeable duty; the September 12, 1980, takeover is an expression of this duty. The Turkish Armed Forces, who have taken over the government of the nation temporarily, in order to return the government to its rightful owner, to correct its malfunctioning democracy and its constitution open to all kinds of deviant [çarpık] thought, interpretation and application, according to the principles and necessities of democracy, have had the constitution redrafted by the Consultative Assembly, which it [Turkish Armed Forces] has brought into being in the name of the Turkish Nation by the National Security Council. (335)

At the National Security Council meeting convened on October 18, 1982, there was almost no debate on the first twenty-three articles of the constitution. These articles were simply read, voted on, and ratified (335–39). The first speaker was on article 24. The president of the council explained what the new required religion courses meant:

We are giving a course in the culture of religion, not a course on religion; in other words, we are going to teach the children necessary matters within history of religion and rules of our religion. When we say “course on religion,” it does not mean to read the Kur'an'
Kerim from cover to cover. No, not that. [Just that] the child has a culture of religion when she/he graduates from primary and middle school. (340)

Admiral Nejat Tümer asked the commission about foreign schools:

These foreign schools, especially Rum schools, have an education on religion they conduct at their own institutions. Besides, we have our French, German, Italian schools; in these places both Turks and foreigners study. Since this obligation is in our Constitution, does it also require the teaching of a course on religion in these schools, or are they exempt? (341)

General Başkaynak responded:

In our international agreements, in the Lausanne Treaty, there are statutes that stipulate that foreigners will be given cultural education in accord with their own religions at their schools in Turkey and these [rights] are reserved; the Turkish State does not interfere in this. In these schools where foreigners study, their own religion courses are taught, but Turkish student do not attend these courses. I guess, from this point on, besides these courses and cultural training the foreigners have on religion, those Turkish or belonging to the religion of Islam will at the same time study the culture of Islam. (341)

The president of the council, four-star general Kenan Evren, remarked with an example from the West to justify the teaching of a religion course on Islam in those schools where there was religious diversity:

When I was in Brussels, a child of an acquaintance was in second grade. At school, they were taking the Muslim children out during that [religion] session, and taught the principles of Christianity to the rest of the children, they don’t take Muslims; but those who want can attend. They also have it, they give culture of religion. (341)

Admiral Nejat Tümer backed this example from Brussels with his experience in Naples: “The same practice exists in Naples as well” (341).
president affirmed: “Of course there is, it is not possible to make a nation religionless. If these children do not receive culture of religion at school or if their families do not give it . . . from where will it be given?” (341–42).

This chapter, like the previous chapters on France, has paid close attention to the articulation of various actors and has woven these self-articulations together in context at key moments of struggle over the institutions of laïklik in Turkey. In contrast to France, the political field at these moments remained encapsulated in a “law of majorities” and “utility of religion” framework oscillating between the political ends of mobilizing and demobilizing religion, between anticlericalism and state-civil religionism, and their different forms and combinations, except in the case of a few minority voices. The institution of state-salaried imams and religion courses could precisely be used like a lever to have state institutions mobilize or demobilize religion. This is crucial for a better assessment of Kemalist laicism in comparative perspective as well as vis-à-vis its challengers in Turkish politics. Among the Third Republic France republicanisms, Kemalist laicism in its origins fell closest to Républicains opportunistes who, in the words of Jules Ferry, were “anticlerical but not antireligious,” a statement very similar to the widely repeated Kemalist motto “Kemalizm dinsizlik değildir” (Kemalism is not irreligious). With the transition to a multiparty system, the Kemalist CHP moved closer to the Républicains progressistes: its institutional politics of religion approached more state-civil religionism.

This chapter documented many crucial moments where the institutional preferences of the Kemalist CHP, intellectuals, or the military came from an explicit pursuit of the political end of mobilizing religion (as the cement of society) against left movements and had nothing to do with the common perception that the “threat of Islam” requires a strategy of containment. The deeper the Kemalist military laid religion into state institutions, the more they had to abstract from it, again a process also visible in Third Republic France. In 1980 Turkey’s military abstracted religion as culture from religion as such in order to normalize the anomaly of a “laic” military constitutionalizing compulsory religion courses. Even at the few moments when institutional separation was seriously evaluated as an alternative, it was done so again on the premises of “law of majorities” and “utility of religion” and for the sake of mobilizing religion. The liberal arguments for institutions that ultimately resolved the struggle between anticlericalism and state-civil
religionism in the French Third Republic could not reach the sphere of institution making in Turkey and remained limited to a few marginalized voices that ignited discussion but never could bear on the institutional outcome.

Comparative references to Europe in general, the United States, and European cases, France in particular, were a significant part of the discussions laid out in this chapter. The rampant presence of such references is theoretically significant in itself and can be taken as a part of the micro politics of modernization outside the “West.” These comparative references display competing interpretations not only through time but also across political groups who are pursuing different ends. For instance, both the late 1940s CHP and the 1980 military claimed to directly follow Europe but rediscovered Europe as religious space in advocating religion courses in public schools, grounding themselves on distinctions such as regime versus policy, and religion as such versus as culture. While in the writing of the 1961 constitution the struggle was between those who found religion under threat and those who found the regime under threat, the latter defending a sociological and the former an institutional understanding of “the West.” Those who found religion under threat dominated the whole episode and asserted a difference in sociological state between Europe and Turkey in order to defend institutions they found to be non-European.149

This contrast between a sociological and an institutional reading of Europe resembles the sociological and institutional readings of the United States in the Third French Republic, respectively defended by opponents and proponents of the 1905 separation law, documented in chapter 3. Such variety and shifts in referencing “Europe” in Turkey pose a challenge at multiple levels to the existing discussions on comparative modernities and secularisms, especially when evaluated together with the variety of comparative references to the “United States” and other European countries in the Third French Republic (chapter 3) and to “Turkey” in contemporary France (chapter 4). I will discuss this theoretical and methodological challenge in the conclusion.