DOCUMENTS

As announced already in the last issue of Die Welt des Islams a new section of contributions to this journal is introduced with the following translation of an official statement on important religious issues which was published by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İleri Baskanlığı) of the Republic of Turkey in Ankara in 2002.¹ This statement, a final communiqué of a consultation meeting of members of the Diyanet with leading scholars in the field of Islamic Theology in Turkey, was already discussed by Xavier Jacob in his article which has recently been published in this journal.² Some of the issues which were treated by this communiqué, like the questions related to the interpretation of the religious sources, to women’s rights in Islam, to issues of the pilgrimage, to the language of Quranic recitation and of the call to prayer, and to other acts of worship and ritual are certainly of high significance for Muslims not only in Turkey, but also in Europe, as this statement would appear to articulate a minimum consensus reached by representatives of traditionalist and modernist trends in Turkish Islam.

CURRENT RELIGIOUS ISSUES CONSULTATION MEETING - I
FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

May 18, 2002 ISTANBUL

(English translation by Raoul Motika and Stefan Reichmuth, Bochum)

The Presidency of Religious Affairs whose essential duty it is to enlighten the public on religious matters, has until now tried to fulfill this mission to the best of its ability starting from the day it was established.

Social changes which have been expedited by the developments in scientific and technological areas have deeply influenced the traditional understanding of the religion and in turn necessitated new discussions over many issues, and caused the emergence of new problems which are in need of urgent solutions.

These problems should be solved through scientific methods. The public discussion of them not only hampers the finding of salutary solutions but also leads to mental confusion in society and offends the religious sentiments of our people.

In order that religious matters do not result in unnecessary tension, and that the proposed solutions convince and satisfy our people who are attached to the religion, it is highly necessary to act according to considerations which take both traditional experiences and modern developments into account, instead of making speculative statements.

The reliance upon scientific methods in the expression of views on religious matters enables us to reach convincing solutions for the people at large. This will prevent the use of religious sources as a “means for legitimation” and will curtail the influence of marginal currents in religious issues.

The accumulation of knowledge and experience by our Faculties of Theology which examine the nature of religion, the historical experience of Muslims and modern religious issues within the framework of academic disciplines provides the potential to overcome these problems and even to serve as a model for other Islamic countries.

In order to benefit from this accumulation of knowledge the Presidency of Religious Affairs has found it necessary to organize a scientific Consultation Meeting “Solutions for Current Religious Issues”. Members of the Higher Council of Religious Affairs and scholars met at a conference which was held under this topic in the Istanbul Grand Tarabya Hotel on 15-18 May 2002.

Four separate commissions were established at this meeting and the following subjects were discussed:
1. Traditionalist and modernist approaches to the correct understanding and interpretation of religious texts and their implications for society,
2. Religious discussions on women’s issues in the modern world,
3. Discussions on pilgrimage rites,

Practical solutions were found for certain problems, and important steps were taken for the solution of others. These decisions which were discussed and accepted by the General Board of the meeting demonstrate that there is no essential conflict between religion and universal values and that it is possible to solve the problems created by social change in a sound perspective.

We hope that these decisions will eliminate mental confusion on religious matters and will contribute to the maintenance of social understanding and peace.

The following decisions were arrived at by the commissions and accepted by the General Board:

1. It can be misleading to classify the methods of interpreting and understanding religious texts (Quran and Hadith) into dichotomous categories