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THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

Prof. Dr. Nadirova

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kaliyeva

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafayeva

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan

ABSTRACT

Background: We analyze the emergence and development of religious education in Kazakhstan. The question is: why over 25 years of independence the processes of legitimization and incorporation of the religious education in social reality still have not been brought to completion, while the need for the introduction of religious literacy and training of professional theologians was actively declared on governmental level, promoted in the media and public forums?

Methods: We used such methods as surveys and questionnaires, content analysis, discourse analysis.

Results: Institutionalization occurs through the embedding of practices, meanings, expectations, and values. A number of laws and regulations pertaining to the sphere of religion have been adopted in Kazakhstan, but the development of religious education is still far from being completed. Even the vision of the goals and objectives of this type of education by various organizations, institutions and actors is formulated and embodied in different ways. We see the reason in the government fears of losing process control, especially over its ideological (i.e. political) content. This situation is clearly unacceptable for the power. Although the educational structure and curricula for training religious scholars and religious figures are available, there are practically no well-articulated and substantiated concept and qualitative methodological support, as well as systemic research in this field.

Conclusions: Although the principle of secularism implies the separation of the state from religious dogma, it does not mean the removal of religion from public life. In the context of Kazakhstan instead of delineation of spheres of influence of the state and religious organizations, the state maintains social and political power and control in the sphere of religious education that, on the one hand, is associated with particular concern of national security and social stability, and on the other hand, artificially constrains the implementation process.

Determining the status, strategies and legitimization of religious education can contribute to the actualization and realization of the essential features of religion in its impact on modern society in social and cultural spheres.

Keywords: education, religion, Kazakhstan, state, society

INTRODUCTION

With the achievement of political independence, and the ensuing spiritual, more specifically, Islamic awakening, the Republic of Kazakhstan has experienced a revival of Islamic education, which from the beginning of 90-ies of XX century gradually became widespread

At the same time, the current situation is characterized by strengthening the role of government agencies in control over the appearance of radical religious communities, revitalization of the non-traditional beliefs, active struggle against the influence of the foreign missionary movement and the expansion of the social base of sectarian organizations, especially through participation of young people. Strengthening the activities of sects and cults, which are considered destructive, is of greatest concern of security agencies. In this regard, the need to learn the basics of religious doctrines, the introduction of religious / religious studies education at all levels, starting from school, has been repeatedly raised in the media, government agencies, and public forums.

It is common to distinguish between two types of education related to religion. Religious education, which aims to spread religious faith, to strengthen it, teaching the tenets and practices, regulations and rules of conduct, with the aim of raising the individual believer, as well as training of clergy. Religious education in Kazakhstan is taught in Sunday schools, educational courses at mosques, madrasahs, seminaries, universities.

The second type is Religious studies, which aims to study religions as an integral part of the culture in their relationship and interaction with other areas of human life and activity. This kind of teaching is secular, gives knowledge about religion, which should possess everyone, regardless of his or her faith or lack of it. It aims to educate people with a rich culture, tolerant, open-minded, friendly to people around, regardless of their nationality, religion and worldview. Education in Religious Studies in Kazakhstan is carried out within public educational institutions - schools, colleges, universities.

We analyze the institutionalization of religious education in Kazakhstan. The question is: why over 25 years of independence the processes of legitimization and incorporation of the religious education in social reality still have not been brought to completion, while the need for the introduction of religious literacy and training of professional theologians was actively declared on governmental level, promoted in the media and public forums?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the description of the stages, structures, and procedures of the religious education emergence and development, we used such methods as surveys, content analysis, discourse analysis. Materials of surveys conducted by our group of researchers among teachers of Almaty schools, teachers of the subject "Basics of Religious Studies" at the beginning of 2015-2016 academic year and survey of parents of school students of the East Kazakhstan region conducted by Public Fund "The theological information and advisory center "Sana'a" (Kokshetau city) were used.

RESULTS

The modern system of religious education passed a certain way in the development

in search of effective forms of transfer of knowledge and skills, relying on the tradition of training existing in the steppe through representatives of Islamic clergy. Without going deep into history of formation of confessional education in Kazakhstan, its changes and transformation connected with various periods of ethnic history, we note that the famous researcher Ashirbek Muminov, believes that "neither imperial colonization, nor the subsequent Soviet period couldn't suppress finally the traditionalism of the people of the region which is closely connected with a local form of Islam existing and specifics of confessional education. On the contrary, deprivation of the state support of religion during imperial colonization and the subsequent violent secularization during the Soviet period created conditions for distribution of nonconventional forms of confessional education that concealed the considerable potential of ritual and political opposition» [1]

Development of religious education in Kazakhstan after obtaining independence can be divided into three important backbone stages, each of which is characterized by the set of distinctive features. The first stage – from 1991 till the beginning of the 2000th - is connected with sharp awareness of need to open doors for religion and religious knowledge, considering long isolation of the country from foreign sources, the centers, shrines of the religious world and attempt to find the new identity which isn't held down by former rigid atheistic ideology.

This sharp growth of religiosity, we are talking primarily about Islam, was largely supported by the purposeful policy of the state leadership, which has set the task of strengthening national identity and a new image of the country and underestimated the risk of religion politicization and increasing of religious consciousness. In 1992, developing the concept of formation and development of Kazakhstan as a sovereign state, President Nazarbayev openly wrote: "... we have to take into account an Islamic factor owing to its real value in the modern international relations.... The international communication with the Islamic world will be used for mutually beneficial cooperation in all spheres, especially economic recovery and a standard of living of all population of Kazakhstan" [2].

At this stage, educational institutions that have assumed the responsibility for the mission of spreading religious education, appeared without any system, each of them carried out the educational process independently, according to their program, plans, visions and facilities. Due to the lack of any central regulatory authority, to coordinate the preparation of the much-needed skilled professionals - specialists in Islam, there was no unified model curriculum in this area. Activity of new educational institutions was stripped on the one hand of the technical and methodological support from the government, on the other hand there was no control from the Ministry of Education and Science. Low educational level of many local imams not capable to read the Qur'an or to make religious practices correctly, promoted public awareness of foreign missionaries among the Muslims wishing to gain elementary religious knowledge. This fact caused rather free introduction of Islamic missionaries in the Kazakhstan space in the early nineties. Missionary activity, especially in the Southern Kazakhstan, carried out originally through mosques, promoted growth of activity of the Muslim centers of education dependent on external financial sources. For example, at the expense of the Qatar Charitable Foundation, training center and boarding were built, for more than 70 young men from poor families and orphans, and then there were private institutes - Kazakh-Arab University and the Kazakh-Kuwait University, which mainly maintained at the expense of foreign charities, such as Social Reform Society and the International

Association of Taiba.

These funds sent their teachers, who were ill informed about Kazakhstani Islam, and, therefore, did not adhere at training Hanafi tradition, strengthened here. On the basis of the established direct cooperation with the Middle East countries, students and teachers were given the opportunity passing language training at foreign universities (especially in Libya, with the mediation of the Libyan Embassy in Kazakhstan). However, after the tightening of state control over the activities of foreign private foundations a reduction of foreign financial support began to be observed. In 2005 following the results of the state certification and check of educational activity from the commission of the Ministry of Education and Science there was a reforming of Kazakh-Arab University, the faculty of religious studies was closed. A year before the Kazakh-Kuwaiti university's licenses for educational activity was withdrawn, though transforming to the Southern Kazakhstan Humanitarian Academy it functioned as a private secular higher educational institution with free education, for the students observing all canons of Sharia [3].

In an effort to get quality religious knowledge, many students left on their own to study in Arab countries, where they were looking for financing sources, coming to certain organizations and foundations. This group of students got under special attention of the state, when in 2000, after the events in neighboring Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the President of Kazakhstan ordered to return to Kazakhstan the students who got abroad not on government or the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK) channels. This fact showed, on the one hand, attempt of the state to tighten control of religious education, and on the other, the lack of a clear mechanism for the settlement of this issue in the state and religious structures.

The older generation of Muslim clergy were offered to pass professional training at the Institute of Advanced Training of imams. Educational programs, drawn up on the basis of experience of Islamic institutes in Moscow, Uzbekistan, Turkey and Islamabad, are based primarily on the further study of the Arabic language and in-depth study of religious subjects, including tafsir, fiqh, akidat al-Islam, etc.

The second stage in the development of religious education – from the beginning of the 2000s up to 2011 – was a time of revising the attitude to the missionary activities of foreign centers and bringing the educational process into compliance with state standards in the existing religious institutions with closing those which did not meet these standards. If in the 90s about 20 madrassas functioned in major cities of Kazakhstan, in the beginning of 2000 the activity of almost all madrassas was stopped as inappropriate to requirements of educational religious institutions. Distribution of the so-called salafiyya literature and ideology calling "to fight against the infidels and the creation of an Islamic state" was the cause for their closing.

Religious education in foreign Islamic centers is gradually losing its relevance, since the need to adhere to local Islam with its regional specificity is increasingly emphasized in order to avoid the spread of alien Islamic ideology. In general, SAMK attempts to establish methods and forms of both enlightenment and education tend to the further development and improvement

Simultaneously the number of illegal religious groups that have reputation of "totalitarian sects" and "destructive cults" has increased. They were charged with orienting its members to violate the laws of the country, evasion of military service and other civic norms of behavior. There were attempts on their part to politicize the activities of a number of denominations, to extend their influence in the sphere of

political relations, culture, education, etc. Young people more actively than other social strata became involved in radical organizations. That is why the policy of government bodies and official clergy concerning the education of young people and increasing religious literacy has significantly intensified.

Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On measures for the prevention and suppression of manifestations of terrorism and extremism," was issued dated 10.02.2000 according to which a special course "Basics of religious studies" was to be taught in secondary schools since 2004. And in 2009, for the implementation of the Decree of the President "to form social and cultural knowledge of the religion" 1 hour per week of Elective Course "Basics of religious studies" was introduced in the 9th grade of secondary schools.

State agencies raised issues of an effective mechanism for professional religious expertise both of imported and published in the country religious products. However, insufficient educational level of the clergy of the major denominations, as well as a small number of civil servants having professional theological knowledge significantly interfered with the solution of this problem. Faculty of Islamic Studies of the Kazakh-Egyptian University Nur-Mubarak had to fill this gap. Since the main function of the faculty is to train imams and scholars of Islam in Kazakhstan, its curriculum along with the inclusion of the necessary range of secular subjects (among them, the history of Kazakhstan, Kazakh language and literature, computer science) consisted mainly of religious subjects (al-quran al-karim, tafsir-ul-Qur'an, fiqh, sharia, aqida, the history of Islam, Islamic philosophy) and the Arabic language. Teaching staff is formed mainly of experts from Egypt (Al-Azhar University, Cairo University) and Kazakhstani graduates of al-Azhar and Libya Universities. In addition, five universities in the country has begun preparation of bachelors and masters of Religious Studies: Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Yasawi University, Egyptian University of Islamic Culture "Nur-Mubarak" University of Foreign Languages and business career. For parishioners in almost all mosques of the country increasing religious literacy courses were opened. Gradually, the contours of the state policy in religious education began to appear.

October 11, 2011 the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On religious activity and religious associations" was adopted. It marked the beginning of a new, third phase, which has become a period of determining of the state strategic line in the area of religion in the new geopolitical conditions, characterized by the intensification of relations of radical religious groups in Kazakhstan and first appeared outbreaks of violence and terrorism. The Law reaffirmed the democratic and secular character of the state, recognized the historical role of the Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the development of culture and spiritual life of the people, but at the same time introduced a number of restrictions for worship, religious rites, ceremonies and (or) meetings, as well as for missionary activities.

Re-registration of all religious organizations and associations of Kazakhstan is carried out. Certain new structures are created: Agency for Religious Affairs, one of whose functions is the study and analysis of spiritual (religious) educational organizations activities, Public Association "The Congress of Religious Studies scholars" for the involvement of experts in religious matters to the training and retraining of civil servants and teaching staff (special courses, seminars, workshops, conferences); as well as the study of the experience of teaching religion in secondary and higher education institutions. Informational and educational Internet portal "E-Islam" was

created in order to meet the cognitive, spiritual and religious needs of Muslims and all those who are interested in Islam. Information about the traditional spiritual values of the Kazakh people is given there.

Under the guidance of the SAMK the following structure of the religious education system has developed:

- University "Nur-Mubarak", where 150 people come to study "Islamic Studies" on state grants each year;
- Institute of Advanced Training of imams,
- Center for training the Quran reciters,
- Nine madrassas, which received the status of college.

For this purpose, According to Chairman of the SAMK, Mufti Yerzhan kazhy Malgazhyuly "substantial reforms in madrassas activities were carried out. There have been changes and additions to the madrasa's education programs. In addition to the compulsory religious subjects social subjects that meet the requirements of modern society were included» [4]. Besides every year, about 30 imams are trained at courses of religious education in universities in Turkey and Egypt. According the SAMK plans, potentially all 500 major mosques imams (regional, city and district), should have two diplomas - religious and secular, to be fully developed, politically literate, able to work with people.

November 24, 2015 at the national conference in Almaty for the first time in the history of the Spiritual Administration a "Concept of development of religious (spiritual) education of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan till 2020" was adopted. The main aim of this concept is the "formation of a united Islamic educational complex, satisfying the spiritual needs of society and every citizen, creating a kind of model of religious education teaching various formats." [4] It is expected that the concept will serve as the basic strategic document defining the future direction of the Islamic education system.

DISCUSSION

During the independence period, the state and the Islamic clergy have come to realize that the development of denominations under the influence of external and internal factors may create a risk of loss of this process control and threaten of the formation of alternative structures of power, with its own mechanisms of mobilization. One of the ways of this challenge solutions was the development of local Islamic education structure in its most loyal and controlled forms.

To this end, certain measures have been taken to promote the idea of legitimacy only Hanafi school of thought in the conditions of Kazakhstan in mass consciousness, a legal and regulatory framework for the formation of the structure and content of religious education was created, and the position of a secular Religious Studies education was strengthened up to the implementation of its components through public standards and training programs in the training base of denominational institutes. The latter condition is necessary because exactly this mandatory state component of the curriculum allows pushing the ideological principles and guidelines aimed at countering radical religious groups and the suppression of protests and potential conflicts of certain ethnic and religious communities and opposition ideological currents.

In this context Religious Studies become a priority, and all the latest official forums, documents, concept of religious education of SAMK, and media promote the idea of strengthening, on the one hand, the component of secular subjects in the system of

religious education and, on the other hand, Religious Studies disciplines in the system of secular education. In terms of power and religious leadership It allows forming worldviews of students and pupils with the aim of strengthening the loyalty to the state and the government, which is difficult in the teaching of purely religious subjects, abstracted from political realities. These factors strengthen state control over religious education, but at the same time leave less and less space in the framework of education for religious knowledge, spiritual practices and search.

As surveys of parents of schoolchildren showed the introduction of the Religious Studies subject caused ambiguous attitude in society [5]. Some believe that religious education should be the exclusive prerogative of the family and school should not deal with issues of religion since the church is separated from state. This is exactly the case when the religious education and education of religious studies are equalized. Other people are afraid that the lessons of religion can be used to students zombification, suggestion and manipulation by teachers.

Not just relevant authorities of the Ministry of Education and Science conduct nevertheless monitoring the implementation of these guidelines, but by the prosecutor's office, that is an unprecedented fact for a school subject. Moreover, there is a proposal to make the disciplines of Religious studies mandatory in higher education and, again, as an important instrument of confrontation ideology and practice of radicalism and extremism. Thus, need to fight the threat of 'radical' Islam, the formation of a loyal soft confessional community gradually narrows religious education function reducing them to the most pragmatic and relevant state interests.

As professor Muminov proposed: "In order to provide local Hanafi Islam which is more corresponding to notion of enlightened Islam in the desired meaning and which, unlike the Islamists of all types recognizes the secular character of the political system, it is necessary to support those theologians, that remain on solid Hanafi positions with the recognition of separateness of local forms of Islam from the rest of the Muslim world. As a result, we will have a system of religious education, which would be based solely on the Hanafi madhhab, whose positions are politically loyal to the state's domestic and foreign policy" [1].

CONCLUSION

Although the principle of secularism implies the separation of the state from religious dogma, it does not mean the removal of religion from public life. In the context of Kazakhstan instead of delineation of spheres of influence of the state and religious organizations, the state maintains social and political power and control in the sphere of religious education that, on the one hand, is associated with particular concern of national security and social stability, and on the other hand, artificially constrains the implementation process.

Determining the status, strategies and legitimization of religious education can contribute to the actualization and realization of the essential features of religion in its impact on modern society in social and cultural spheres. The main motivating impetus to the emergence of religious and religious studies education system in Kazakhstan in the first stage was the desire to deideologize intellectual and cultural space of the country, to give a chance to recover national and cultural identity of its citizens, to reveal spiritually enriching role of religion for the Kazakhstan society.

In the second stage, there was a task to put in order spontaneously developed situation in this area, get out from under the ideological influence, introduced from

outside by foreign actors and build the domestic model of religious and religious studies education, which should consolidate, and not destabilize society.

In the third, current, phase, we are witnessing how, under the influence of the state, close faced with the problem of counteraction to extremism and terrorism in the country, the system of religious education is institutionalized and transformed into one of the managed and controlled social segments of society.

Thus, the answer to the question about the reason for the incompleteness of religious education in Kazakhstan can be summarized as follows. Model of religious education, aimed at forming a new generation of individuals who are widely informed and creative in the field of religious discourse, seeking to self-knowledge and knowledge of the life, faith and mission of Islam, able to increase understanding of the nature of religion and of different religions, foster skills of reflection, discernment, critical thinking, judging and deciding how to act in accordance with conscience has not yet developed, precisely because of political engagement of confessional educational sphere, which occurred "from above", that obviously led to the emergence of what could be called the Kazakh model of religious education, which however is still in the formative stage

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THE INTRODUCTION OF IT COURSE AT PROFESSIONAL STUDY OF CIVIL ENGINEERING

Dr. Mandi Orlić Bachler

Zagreb University of Applied Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia

ABSTRACT

In this academic year 2015/2016 at the professional study of Civil engineering IT course "Computer Use in Civil Engineering" was introduced for the first time. As a part of the course, three software packages have been taught: AutoCAD, MS Excel and Maxima. In Civil Engineering, AutoCAD package is used for producing technical drawings, MS Excel for developing spreadsheets and solving simple mathematical problems, while Maxima is suitable for manipulating symbolic and numerical expressions, including solving complex mathematical problems. The paper considers the course program, objectives of the course and reasons for mastering computer programs AutoCAD, Excel and Maxima. For a better understanding of the course contents, examples of problems are offered for all three software packages. The paper also exhibits outcome for both preliminary and final examinations. At the end, students' opinions on the course, collected by means of a questionnaire, are presented.

Keywords: IT course, computer program, Civil engineering

INTRODUCTION

In academic year 2015/2016 at the professional study of Civil engineering of the Zagreb University of Applied Sciences course "Computer Use in Civil Engineering" was introduced for the first time as the sole IT course. For quite a long period, discussions have been held as to whether is necessary to introduce it, which matter was addressed in the work [1] in 2012 and it is only now that the idea was realized. Results of the questionnaire presented in that paper showed that it was necessary to introduce an IT course in the curriculum in order to provide students with basic knowledge on potentials of using computers in civil engineering, architecture and mathematics as major courses. Besides, this would enable students, particularly those with grammar school background, to use some of the most important software in civil engineering, such as CAD software. The paper presents curriculum of the IT Course, objectives set and learning outcomes. Considering the fact that the course includes fundamental engineering software AutoCAD as well as MS Excel and Maxima as mathematics software, the paper exhibits examples of problems as well. Further, results obtained at both preliminary and final examinations are addressed. At the end, students' reflections on the course performance, its contents and possibilities for implementing acquired topics are presented. Students' reflections were collected by means of a questionnaire performed on a sample of 220 students enrolled in the course.

COURSE CURRICULUM

IT Course is taught during the first semester of the civil engineering course. Teaching included 15+15 hours in one semester, i.e. 1 hour of lectures and 1 hour of hands-on training a week. The objective is to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge and