

*Global Muslim Modernities & The Post--Secular*  
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Paper Proposal:

**"Turkish Theology Faculties: Redefining Modernity"**

The challenges modernity poses to religion, in particular to a monotheistic tradition like Islam, are often framed in terms of gender, authority, skepticism, and orientation vis-à-vis other religions. Moreover, the lens with which modernity is defined and negotiated is still overwhelmingly driven by intellectual narratives which place Europe and North American contributions front and center. Yet, as scholarship recognizes more and more, modernity is a complex, emergent global phenomenon—not merely a cultural export. Turkey along with its late Ottoman history is a case and point. Both Ottoman intellectuals and Turkish thinkers have an extensive track record of engagement with other intellectual milieus across the globe—including on issues such as materialism, skepticism and atheism. This paper looks at state-funded Turkish theology faculties, their Ottoman legacy, and current attempts to define and redefine modernity. In particular, Turkish theological works explicitly engaging modernity and 'Western' thinkers associated with the theory and intellectual roots of modernity are examined. As will be seen, Turkish theologians are versed in both Islamic and European/Anglo-Saxon intellectual traditions and use Islamic resources to redefine the terms of discussion on modernity.

Much scholarship exists examining religion in Turkey, but generally from a political or sociological vantage. Apart from German Jesuit scholar Felix Körner, relatively little work has been done to explicitly examine theological voices for their theological value. Even Körner's work limits itself to looking at questions of sacred hermeneutics, without exploring other

intersecting themes, such as gender. Nevertheless, he has rightly signaled an untapped and lively discussion in state funded Turkish theology faculties, a vein which despite the international activities of many Turkish theologians and scholars remains largely inaccessible to those who do not speak Turkish. State funded Turkish theological faculties and their affiliated organizations distinguish themselves from other religious voices and authorities in Turkey today through a unique and intentional double dialogue—one with European and Anglo-Saxon scholarship and one with classical (and sometimes modern) Arab Islamic authorities. Of especial relevance are Turkish theologians’ formulations of modern intellectual authority—that is, what place do Turkish theologians accord Western philosophical claims? How do they both challenge and integrate Western claims to authority into an Islamic approach to religion in the modern world? The inquiry will focus on the writings of several Turkish theologians, whose publications are primarily directed to tackling such issues: theologians Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, Şaban Ali Düzgün, and Recep Alpyağlı will stand at the center of this analysis.

By looking at academic theologians who address both the question of modernity and specific European thinkers associated with modernity (and even post-modernity)—Descartes, Leibniz, Kierkegaard, Gadamer, Caputo and even Derrida—it is possible to glean fresh perspectives on modernity, one that claims roots in a long tradition of Ottoman and Islamic scholarship. These Turkish perspectives on modernity are both fully modern and fully Islamic, and as such represent valuable contributions to wider discussions on religion in modernity.