

Muslim theologian Nihat Hatipoglu “converts” an unwitting Christian boy

by Hugh Fitzgerald



In Turkey, a Muslim theologian, Nihat Hatipoğlu, known for his popular television shows during Ramadan, converted 21 people to Islam during a live broadcast. Among them was a 13-year old Armenian boy.

The only requirement for conversion to Islam is the recital of the shahada, which states ‘‘There is no god but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God.’’

Hatipoğlu claimed that the boy’s family had consented to the conversion, but his mother, Alia Y., said they had never given such consent:

"My child did not become a Muslim. We are Armenians, Christians. If I knew about it, I would [have accompanied] my child [to prevent him from being lured onto the program], but I did not. I was working," the mother said.

A piquant aspect of the conversion of this young boy, Arthur, is that he apparently had been assured that if he went on the television show and participated, he would "receive presents and offered food." He appeared on the show, unaware of quite what it was all about, but knowing there would be some sort of gifts at the end. Surrounded by 20 others reciting the shahada, he recited it just as they did, without understanding the significance of what he had just done. There is no indication that he had ever read a word of the Qur'an, or knew a thing about Islam, before he recited the shahada. For Turkish secularists, this was a farce in which a young boy was snookered. For devout Muslims, this was a perfectly acceptable conversion; there would be plenty of time, later on, for the boy to read the Qur'an and find out just what he was now expected to believe.

The mother insists that "he is a child, he made a mistake. He did not become a Muslim."

Turkey's Human Right Association's committee on racism and discrimination has filed a legal complaint against Hatipoğlu. And Arthur's mother has contacted Garo Paylan, a Turkish-Armenian lawmaker who befits to the secular, and predominantly Kurdish, Democratic People's Party (HDP).

Paylan said on Twitter that he had talked to Arthur's mother, who told him that she had not given consent for the young boy to take part in the television show. The lawmaker accused Hatipoğlu of abuse, and has said he would file legal

complaints with both the country's television watchdog and with the state prosecutor's office.

Hatiopo?lu has been caught in a lie – the family never gave its consent for Arthur to appear on the show – but will no doubt deny it. He no doubt feels that because his higher purpose was to convert another Unbeliever, that justifies such little white lies. And now we also know that this boy had been inveigled – tricked – into appearing on the show by the promise of presents (and food). He likely had no idea what was going to happen. There he was, in a television studio, full of cameras, lights, excitement, a young boy alongside twenty grownups, each of whom recited the shahada for Hatiopo?lu.

How could he, aged 13, withstand the pressure from the genial and determined Nihat Hatiopo?lu? And there he was, in the midst of twenty others converting in front of him. In such circumstances, it is most unlikely that the boy would – the only one out of twenty-one– have declined to recite the shahada.

One hopes that the public prosecutor, who has been asked to look into this matter, will issue a report on the inveiglements of Nihat Hatiopo?lu, taking advantage of a young Christian who had no idea what he was getting into. One suspects that Arthur had not read any of the Qur'an other than the shahada when he "converted." But in Islam, despite such total ignorance, recital of the shahada is all one needs for conversion to be valid. Many non-Muslims are unaware of just how farcical the "conversion" to Islam – a conversion that requires no knowledge of the faith – can be. The outrageous story of the "conversion" of Arthur can help them understand.