

The Fate of Muslims under Soviet Rule

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953:173

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47 East 67th Street, New York 21, N. Y.

P R E F A C E

In connection with the interest which the American Friends of the Middle East take in the Islamic world, our attention has been frequently drawn to the millions of Muslims living in the territories of the Soviet Union.

Under the former Russian regime no barriers existed to prevent a fruitful and continuous interchange between the Muslims of Russia and their brethren in the vast Muslim world. Under the Soviets a complete change took place. The natural ebb and flow of travelers and pilgrims, ideas and books, was almost completely dammed. The Muslims of Russia were gradually isolated, information about them grew scarce and such as trickled through was of questionable value and seldom up to date.

We collected reliable material here and there but it was not of sufficient volume to give an adequate survey of the situation in pamphlet form. Then, during the latter part of 1957 a Tatar from the Kazan district, Mr. Gasis Feisullin, stepped into my office with a Russian manuscript which contained many pertinent quotations from Russian sources, most of them of the post-Stalin era. The acquisition of this material provided the necessary impetus for writing this monograph. Thus the credit for the appearance of this study really belongs to Mr. Feisullin.

I also have to thank Reverend Leopold L. S. Braun, A. A., of the Assumptionist Russian Research and Missionary Development, for reading the manuscript and for valuable suggestions on basic material.

The booklet does not pretend to be an exhaustive study of the subject, but we hope that it will throw some light on the conditions under which Muslims are valiantly struggling to hold fast to their spiritual heritage in the U.S.S.R. today.

INTRODUCTION

By

*The Hon. CORNELIUS VAN H. ENGERT,
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When I traveled in Russian Central Asia in the summer of 1945 I was told that I was the first American to be permitted to make the overland journey from Kabul to Moscow. This vast area which lies between the Caspian Sea and Mongolia in one direction, and between Siberia and Iran and Afghanistan in the other, is larger than the whole of Europe, but has a population of less than thirty-five million, unevenly divided between five so-called autonomous republics. In the Soviet Constitution of December 1936 these republics were enumerated as: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kirghizia, and Tajikistan. Owing to the Soviet passion and genius for secrecy very little is known about these countries, apart from masses of statistics which are often meaningless, or at least extremely unreliable. In fact, the West has today far less accurate information concerning conditions there than was the case half a century ago under the Czarist regime when, for example, the American Pumpelly-Carnegie Expedition in 1904 was allowed to travel freely all over what was then Russian Turkestan. Today the whole region seems more remote and uncharted than ever.

It is perhaps one of the greatest ironies in history that the conquest of Central Asia by Imperial Russia in the second half of the 19th century passed practically unnoticed in the West, except perhaps in England where it was watched as a potential threat to India. The reason for this is, in the first place, that most people thought the region was merely a part of Siberia (where the Russians had been since the 17th century), and secondly because expansion by land was less overt and less spectacular than the acquisition of overseas colonies which was then in full swing by the other great European powers. But the irony goes farther and deeper: for today, when the word "colonialism" has (quite unfairly) become a term of opprobrium, the world seems to have completely forgotten that both the Czars and their successors the Communists have controlled an immense colonial empire composed entirely of alien races.

With the occupation of the Caucasus and of Central Asia, the old Russian Empire became deeply involved in the affairs of the Muslim

peoples. Although Imperial Russian rule was initially very severe, it soon became on the whole easy-going and tolerant and allowed the natives to follow pretty much their own way of life. Local customs were rarely interfered with and Muslims were treated with considerable respect. Pilgrimages to Mecca took place annually, and no Russian Orthodox missions were permitted to work or proselytize among Muslims. In the Russian Douma (Parliament) of 1906 there were 60 Muslim deputies, all elected under precisely the same electoral laws as the Christian deputies. There was no military conscription until 1916 — and even then only for non-combatant services. The government believed in, and relied largely on, a form of indirect rule by letting able natives rise to high rank, and by maintaining a traditional oligarchy in positions of prestige and even considerable power. By and large the system was surprisingly successful.

With the Bolshevik Revolution a decisive change took place. As the Muslims constitute the largest non-Slavic minority in Russia, the Communists at first proceeded cautiously, and by a proclamation of December 7, 1917, promised all Muslim subjects complete religious freedom. But events soon proved Moscow's hypocrisy and revealed its determination to break the spirit and influence of Islam. A long series of crude and blatant attacks on the prophet Muhammad were made, ridiculing him and all other religious leaders; literally hundreds of mosques were closed and many others razed to the ground; most of the religious schools were abolished; and thousands of mullahs were exiled, imprisoned, or executed. One of the finest mosques in Bokhara was turned into a warehouse, and the famous Ulu Beg College in Samarkand (founded by a grandson of Tamerlane) became an Atheist Museum. When I visited Afghanistan for the first time in 1922 streams of refugees (including the Amir of Bokhara) had already poured into the country with tales of ruthless persecution, atheistic propaganda, semi-starvation, and political oppression.

Since then the frontiers have been much more closely guarded and few individuals manage to escape into Afghanistan or Iran. Even the pilgrimages to Mecca were forbidden and could not be resumed until 1945, when they were officially organized so as to include Soviet propaganda agents. In 1954, for instance, only 21 carefully selected pilgrims were allowed to go. Incidentally, in the thirties a Muslim from Turkestan (Nassir Turyakulov) was the Soviet diplomatic representative in Mecca. He pretended to be a devout follower of Islam, but when King Ibn Saud discovered that he was also president of an atheist organization in Tashkent and was distributing Communist propaganda literature, he asked for his recall.

When Moscow realized that Muslims were evidently not very receptive to the godless doctrines of Communism, it tried to poison the minds of the people by preaching class warfare in Central Asia, a region which had been singularly free from class hatred. In every large city I saw a so-called "Palace of Culture," with the inevitable huge statues of Lenin and Stalin and the usual placards denouncing the rich landowners and proclaiming an almost idolatrous cult of the State. And wherever possible Moscow deliberately stirred up rivalries and dissensions between the various nationalities and tribes, and between the leaders of the same ethnic groupings.

But even in this direction Soviet policy has been full of contradictions. For while, on the one hand, it tried to maintain the fiction that there are five "independent" republics — which of course could be administered only by the relatively small group of Muslim intellectuals — Moscow's agrarian policy, on the other hand, of breaking up large estates was aimed at precisely the same land-holding families which alone could have furnished native leaders. Thus by deliberately undermining the prestige and influence of these leaders it nullified all attempts at local autonomy. This distrust of the natives went so far that not even the Communists among them were given any positions of power. And, as far as I know, no Muslim has ever been a member of the Soviet Politburo.

Another factor which has changed the picture in Central Asia is the gradual Russification of the area which began with the first Five-Year Plan in the twenties and was accelerated during the war years by the removal of heavy industry from European Russia to escape German occupation. It received an added impetus through Khrushchev's relatively new agrarian policy of bringing virgin land under the plow, which caused an influx of millions of Russians.

The presence of these large numbers of Russian immigrants has been a great asset to the Soviets in integrating the vast mineral and agricultural wealth of Central Asia into the Russian economy and defense system. Cotton plantations, for example, rendered possible by thousands of miles of new irrigation canals, have made Russia the third largest cotton-growing country in the world. The iron-ore deposits in Kazakhstan are the largest in Russia, and the principal uranium resources are located in eastern Uzbekistan and southern Kirghizia. All this has enabled Moscow not only to eliminate many Muslims from key positions in government, party, and industry and replace them by Russians, but has also greatly facilitated the cultural Russification programs. Thus the use of the Russian language is being more and more insisted upon. All technical terminology is, of course,

in Russian and a good knowledge of that language is indispensable for all high political and professional positions. But even the native languages have been Russianized by insisting that the Russian (Cyrillic) alphabet be used instead of the Arabic script. This has had the effect of severing the traditional social and religious ties between the older and the younger generations and of creating a distressing barrier between parents and children, although it must be admitted that it has probably made over 80% of the people literate.

In recent years the anti-Islamic policy of the Soviets has therefore stressed not so much its atheistic theory but has painted a picture of Islam as an unscientific religion which is obstinately opposed to all progress. With this as an excuse, the Soviet campaign is proceeding relentlessly and in cold blood to supplant a fine old civilization by a mediocre and purely materialistic new one. To that end it has imposed a Slav political supremacy upon the government, the press, and the schools, and has liquidated all nationalist opposition with savage brutality.

How these and similar policies were gradually applied, and the detrimental effect they have had upon the Muslim community, is the theme of this pamphlet. It should help to throw much needed light on the predicament of Muslims under Soviet rule.

I am in hearty agreement with the conclusion of the author that it seems high time that all Muslims outside of Russia should take a more independent and unbiased interest in the plight of their co-religionists inside Russia. They should themselves challenge the brazen claim of the Soviet Union that the Muslims in Central Asia are free and unmolested in the exercise of their religion, or that the Kremlin is the champion of all the peoples "oppressed" by the "colonial" powers. The Arab Muslims in particular should be warned that the Soviet policy of aggressive expansion is by no means dead, and that they would do well to scrutinize closely Soviet actions in Central Asia. They would then find that Moscow's "colonialism" is far worse than any ever practiced by Western powers. Besides being infinitely more ruthless, it has become an entirely new kind of colonialism, a colonialism of the mind which subordinates everything — ancient cultures, religion, national aspirations — to the Communist ideology.

C. V. H. E.

THE FATE OF MUSLIMS UNDER SOVIET RULE

Various peoples and tribes of Muslim faith populated and still populate vast stretches of southeastern Russia and Central Asia. Among the more important are the Tatars, Bashkirs, Turkomans, Kazakhs and Uzbeks. Even their names are hardly known to us, much less do we know about their customs, culture and way of life. We seldom realize that, as far as statistics can be relied upon, they numbered almost 30,000,000 souls in pre-Soviet days and that, although speaking different languages and dialects, they were united and still are united in spirit by their adherence to the religion of Islam.

It is not easy to evaluate correctly the position of these Muslims in present-day Soviet Russia. We must, however, bear in mind a few important historical facts in order to arrive at any reasonable conclusion. The first is that contacts between Muslims and Russians are by no means of recent date, on the contrary, they are centuries old. The second is that large parts of southern Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia were settled by peoples of non-Slavic origin. The third is that Czarist Russia pursued a policy of expansion and penetration into Central Asia; in other words, it practiced "good old-fashioned imperialism." Outside of Russia this fact is frequently overlooked, because Russia's colonialism was a kind of "next door" colonialism. The Russians had the good fortune not to be obliged to cross the seven seas in order to establish themselves in their neighbor's vineyard.

Thus we find, when scanning the records of history, a checkered picture of ups and downs, of battles and skirmishes, truces and broken promises in the long struggle of the Muslim peoples, Tatars, Bashkirs, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkomans and others, against the Slavs.

How Islam Was Established

At the beginning of the 13th century the Mongols under Genghis Khan and his sons stormed over Central Asia. In 1240 they reached Kiev and destroyed it utterly. In 1241 they advanced into Central Europe, devastated Bohemia, lower Austria and Hungary and then withdrew almost as fast as they had come. However, the retreat was not for long. Large groups of these Mongols, Turks, Tatars and Bashkirs, known as the Golden Horde, settled in the Don basin, in the Crimea, and on the lower Volga. The encampment of Sarai became their communications center.

There the Russian Grand Duke Yaroslav swore fealty to Batu the Mongol, and many Russian princes afterwards paid tribute to the conquerors. Some of the Mongol Khans embraced Islam and in a span of about a hundred years the larger number of the leading tribes of Central Asia had become Muslim.

Under the rule of Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane, the city of Samarkand became the center of their empire and a repository of Muslim art and culture. Other cities like Bokhara and Tashkent also became centers of Islamic civilization and learning. Thus in the 15th century Islam was established all around the Black Sea, in the Crimea, in southern Russia, along the Volga as far north as Kazan and all through Central Asia following a line from Kazan roughly east to the Altai mountain range.

The Advance of the Slavs

In the latter half of the 15th century Mongol power began to wane, and in 1502 the power of the Golden Horde was broken. In 1552 Ivan Grozny seized Kazan, thereby beginning Russian expansion towards the East and the "Russian crusade" against Islam. During the period of the Romanovs (1613-1917) the Slavs made great gains in South Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Under Peter the Great a foothold was gained, and lost, near the Black Sea. Catherine the Great still recognized the Tatars of the Crimea as an independent people but secured Azov and Kerch on the northeastern shore of the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov, for the Russians. Thus a basis was established for the conquest of the Caucasus. It took, however, many years until the freedom loving peoples of the mountains, most of them Muslims, were subdued and their territories incorporated into "Mother" Russia. 1859 was the decisive year; encouraged by their successes, the Russian generals pressed eastward. In 1865 the Russians captured the Uzbek city of Tashkent and made it the capital of the new province of Turkestan. In 1868 Samarkand was occupied and the Khanate of Bokhara converted into a Russian protectorate. In 1873 the Khanate of Khiva was conquered and three years later that of Kokand. Thereafter, the Russians proceeded to subjugate the warlike Turkoman tribes in the Transcaspien region. Thus in about one hundred years Russia had carved out for herself a vast colonial empire and had made serfs of all the Muslim peoples of Central Asia.

In the wake of the Russian armies came Russian merchants and administrators. The process of Russification began. This process was, in some cases, very harsh. The Crimean Tatars, for instance, felt that they could not bear the yoke and emigrated in considerable numbers to Turkey.

Many of the Circassians and the Chechens of the Caucasus did the same and were settled by the Ottoman Turks in Syria and Jordan.

In other parts, especially in Kazakhstan, Russification followed the usual pattern of colonization, by dispossessing the natives of their most valuable lands and by settling Russians on the evacuated holdings or, by proclaiming large areas the property of the state, which led to the same results.

However, many impartial observers reported that Czarist Russia did not in general interfere with the social and religious status of her newly acquired Muslim subjects. The Muslim community had religious freedom, their mosques were not destroyed, their religious teachers, *mullahs*, continued to function and the Muslim law, the *Shariat*, was applied in all Muslim cases.

Nevertheless, the Muslims had many legitimate grievances, nor could they easily forget their lost freedom. Thus when in the beginning of the 20th century the fires of revolution began to flare up in Russia, young Tatar and Turkic nationalist groups thought they too might have a chance to gain freedom and independence. Their activities increased greatly during World War I and finally led to the formation of the League of the Non-Russian Peoples of Russia which convened in Stockholm in 1916. In May of 1917, an All-Russian Muslim Conference was held in Moscow which endorsed the emancipation of Muslim women, recommended the introduction of a uniform Turkic literary language for all Muslims of Turkic origin in Russia, and a central Muslim council. Thus the groundwork was laid for the independence of the Turkic peoples or, in general, the Muslim peoples of Russia. During 1917 a number of independent national republics came into being.

The Promises of the Bolsheviks

However, on November 7, the Kerensky regime was overthrown by a fanatical minority group, the Bolsheviks; the revolution in Russia took a new turn. It was not merely a turning away from the Czars, a domestic Russian affair, but from the standpoint of the Bolshevik leaders it had world significance. From the very beginning it was clearly conceived by them that the Revolution would not only usher in a new era in Russia, but should be a beacon for all the oppressed peoples of the world to shake off the yoke of the colonial powers.

The Bolsheviks had no easy going in the beginning, they neither received the wholehearted support of the Russian peoples nor did the

western European proletariat seem to be inclined to follow their lead. Thus they turned towards the East. Exactly one month later, on December 7, 1917, the Council of People's Commissars of the Bolshevik regime issued a highly significant Appeal to the Muslims of Russia and the East.¹ In it we find the following paragraphs:

"The empire of capitalist plunder and violence is crumbling. The ground under the feet of the imperialist plunderers is on fire.

"In the face of these great events, we turn to you, the toiling and underprivileged Muslims of Russia and the East.

"Muslims of Russia, Tatars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirghiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks and Tatars of Transcaucasia, Chechens and Caucasian mountaineers—all you, whose mosques and shrines, whose faiths and customs have been violated by the Tsars and oppressors of Russia!

"*Henceforth your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions, are decreed free and inviolable!** Build your national life freely and without hindrance. You have the right to do it. Know that your rights, like those of all the peoples of Russia, are being protected by all the might of the Revolution, and by its organs, the councils of workers', soldiers', and peasants' deputies.

"Therefore, support this Revolution and its authorized government!

"Muslims of the East, Persians, Turks, Arabs, and Hindus! All you in whose lives and property, in whose freedom and native land the rapacious European plunderers have for centuries traded! All you whose countries the robbers who began the war now desire to partition!

". . . Overthrow these robbers and enslavers of your countries! Now, when war and desolation are demolishing the pillars of the old order, when the whole world is blazing with indignation against the imperialist usurpers, when any spark of indignation is transformed into a mighty flame of revolution, when even the Indian Muslims, oppressed and tormented by the foreign yoke, are rising in revolt against their subjugators—now, it is impossible to remain silent. Lose no time in throwing off the yoke of the ancient oppressors of your lands! Let them no longer rob your hearths! You yourselves must build your own life in your own way and in your own likeness. You have the right to do this, for your destiny is in your own hands!

"Comrades! Brothers!

¹ Ivar Spector, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World, 1917-1956*, pp. 15-17. Also note *Ibid.*, p. 21, footnote No. 4: "According to A. F. Miller, this Appeal was signed by Lenin and Stalin. See *Ocherki Noveishei Istorii Turtsii*, Akademii Nauk SSSR, Moscow-Leningrad, 1948, p. 79."

* Italics ours.

“Let us advance together firmly and resolutely towards a just and democratic peace.

“Our banners bring liberation to the oppressed peoples of the world.

“Muslims of Russia!

“Muslims of the East!

“On this road to the regeneration of the world, we look to you for sympathy and support.”²

In other speeches during that period, Lenin affirmed that the Communists regarded the religious beliefs and customs of the Muslims as sacred, and that they recognized the validity of the Shariat. Stalin also spoke in the same vein; he tried to assure the Muslims that the Soviet government considered the Shariat as valid and as in force as the laws of all other peoples living in Russia.

These were the glowing promises made by the Bolsheviks, promises of full protection for national freedom and cultural self-determination. To the Muslims, this could only mean that a better era was dawning, that the time of forced Russification was coming to an end.

How were these promises kept? Are the Muslim peoples in the steppes of the Volga, in the Caucasus and in Central Asia free? Have their religious institutions been safeguarded and is their law being applied among them? Does Islam enjoy at least as much freedom as it did under the Czars?

The Soviet government did follow up its December “Appeal to the Muslims” and established a Commissariat for Muslim Affairs in January of 1918; local Muslim commissariats were also organized. As a grand gesture, meant for its propaganda effect in winning the confidence of the Muslims, the Holy Qur’an of Othman was returned to the Muslims, and the famous Bashkir Karvan-Sarai Mosque in Orenburg and the Sumbeki Tower in Kazan were restored to them. In November of 1918 a Central Bureau of Muslim Communist Organizations was set up in Moscow for the purpose of disseminating propaganda in all the languages of the Muslim peoples.

It cannot be questioned that a number of Muslims were beguiled by these promises and willing to cooperate in the hope that real independence of their countries could be eventually achieved.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17. Also note *Ibid.*, p. 21, footnote No. 5: “I. V. Kluchnikov and A. Sabanin (eds.), *Mezhdunarodnaya Politika noveishego vremeni v dogovorakh, notakh i deklaratsiyakh*, Moscow, 1925-1928, Vol. II, pp. 94-96.”

The Congress of Baku

During 1919 and 1920 the Bolsheviks had to struggle against the White Armies in various parts of Russia; by July of 1920 they were sure of victory.

In the same month, from July 19 to August 7, 1920, the Second Congress of the Third International of the Comintern was summoned to Baku. Baku was specially chosen with the thought of expanding Communist rule towards the East, and of wooing the Muslims and gaining their support, not only in Russia but also in Persia, Turkey, Mesopotamia, and the Arab world. Everything went well with the Congress until the last day when, under the chairmanship of Zinoviev, comrade Skatchko let the cat out of the bag. He denounced the Muslim religious leaders as parasites and oppressors who should be deprived of their lands. He called them violators and distorters of their own religious laws, and demanded that the mask of hypocrisy be torn from their faces and all lands belonging to religious institutions be ruthlessly confiscated.³

The importance of the Baku Congress is that it marked a turning point in early Soviet-Muslim relations by reviving the suspicions of Muslims against the Soviet Union. It destroyed the illusion that the Soviet Union might become a haven of refuge for the Muslims. The threat to Islam was clear even to the most ignorant mullahs who had been comparing Marx and Lenin with Muhammad. And no matter how much Muslims outside Russia detested colonialism and all it stood for, they feared even more the anti-religious propaganda that emanated from the Baku Congress.⁴

The Suppression of the Autonomist Movements

The fact soon became evident that the Soviets never intended to fulfill their promise of full autonomy for the Muslim peoples in Russia.

After the Soviet seizure of power in Tashkent, the Communists at the fourth regional congress refused to entertain a Muslim petition for civil administration based on the precepts of Islamic law. In Kokand, however, the Muslims were able to form an autonomous government and appealed to Petrograd for recognition of the Provisional Government of Autonomous Turkestan as the only government of Turkestan. They demanded the dissolution of the Tashkent Soviet because it relied on

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31. Also note *Ibid.*, p. 33, footnote No. 10: "*Ibid.*, (*Pervyi S'ezd Narodov Vostoka (1920). Stenograficheskie otchety*), pp. 192-193."

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

foreign elements hostile to the native population of the country. The reply from Petrograd was ambiguous. Then, in January, 1918, the Kokand government wished to convoke a "Turkestan Constituent Assembly"; the Tashkent Soviet labelled the autonomous government in Kokand a "bourgeois" government. Red guard detachments were summoned, the old city of Kokand was surrounded, and at least 14,000 persons were reported to have perished in the massacre that followed.⁵

In similar fashion all attempts by Muslims to set up genuine autonomous republics elsewhere were crushed. Many Muslim leaders and spokesmen were incarcerated or killed outright. Among the thousands of victims was the revered mufti Karataisky of the Crimean Tatars, whose crime was that he had sent to the Soviet Government a protest against the mass repression of Muslim mullahs in the Crimea.

Early in 1921 Soviet governments were set up in Georgia and Armenia. In the following year these two were combined with Azerbaijan, forming the Transcaucasian Socialist Soviet Republic. On December 30 the latter was incorporated in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In 1925 the Central Asian Republics were added. After the adoption of a new "democratic" constitution, the Soviet Federation was recast, and the republics in predominantly Muslim territories appear under the following names: Azerbaijan, Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kirghistan.

Communism — Basically Against Religion

The Soviets, after having established their authority in Muslim territories, started their struggle in earnest against Islam as a religion which, like all other religions according to their credo, is nothing but a useless superstition dulling the minds of men. They did it by all the means at their disposal, by legislation, by administrative action, by threats of force and force itself, and last but not least by propaganda.

Communism, as the logical outcome of materialism, cannot but be hostile to religion in all its aspects. Thus from the very beginning the Communists aimed at the destruction of religious belief and worship in Soviet Russia. On January 23, 1918, the Law of Separation of Church from State was enacted; it contained thirteen articles and was signed by Lenin, among other people. Article 12 of this law radically deprives all religious leaders, churches, mosques, synagogues, etc., of the right of juridical personality, thus, in fact, placing all religious organizations out-

⁵ Alexander G. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan, 1917-1927*, p. 21, footnote No. 32.

side the law. On April 8, 1929, a more detailed law containing sixty-five articles was decreed, dealing with all aspects of religion, in order to gain an even stricter control over the adherents of any religious faith.

The Soviet Constitution which was promulgated on December 5, 1936, contains in Article 124 the following statement: "In order to insure to citizens freedom of conscience, the Church in the U.S.S.R. is separated from the State, and the School from the Church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens."

On the face of it this seems fair and democratic; people who want to worship may do so, and others who refuse to recognize God are free to do so. However, another code, which is of greatest practical importance to every Soviet citizen, exists in Soviet Russia: this is the Criminal Code. And here we find in Article 58, which has fourteen subdivisions, that worshippers are classed among counter-revolutionaries. Thus, the Secret Police have every opportunity, whenever they deem it advisable or whenever it is politically opportune, to deal with worshippers "extra legum," labelling them as counter-revolutionaries—a procedure which has been followed constantly during the years of Soviet rule. Furthermore, Article 122 of the Soviet Criminal Code in its 1953 edition states:

"The teaching of religious doctrines to children or minors in state or private schools or educational institutions or the violation of regulations established for that purpose carries with it the penalty of corrective forced labor for a period up to one year."

The policy of the Soviet Government is inherently anti-religious, regardless of its disavowal of persecution and regardless of the constitutional right of the Soviet citizen to religious belief. It is designed to facilitate the "dying out" of religion. Toward religion itself the State maintains an attitude of calculated neutrality; toward the privileges of religious societies it adopts a course of prompt extinction. Thus, it maintains an outward fiction of religious tolerance. But as religion leads irresistibly to one form or another of a religious society or community, and—being unable to survive without teaching—the axe is thereby laid at the root of the tree.

The enforcement of these aims is handled with considerable flexibility, especially in the Muslim territories. When the Soviets saw that some measures caused severe disturbances among the Muslims, they yielded some ground but their aim remained the same, the eradication of Islam.

Their immediate goal was the abolition of the three traditional institutions upon which an Islamic society is based: the *waqf* or endowment properties, the Shariat or Qur'anic law, and the system of Islamic education.

Undermining Islamic Society

In a decree promulgated by the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan Republic on December 28, 1922, the right of religious institutions to own endowed properties and to utilize the revenue deriving from them was placed under the Commissariat of Education, and the management of the said properties was delegated to the local authorities, along with the power to appoint and dismiss *waqf* administrators. In other words, religious institutions were at the mercy of the State. By 1930 the Soviet Government had regulated the institution of *waqf* out of legal existence in Central Asia.

The second pillar of Islamic society which the Soviets wished to undermine was the Shariat and the Shariat courts. While the Czarist Government had suppressed only those portions of Shariat justice which interfered with the functions of the Russian administration, the Soviet Government condemned the entire Muslim legal system to extinction.

For a time the Soviet Peoples' Courts and the Shariat courts acted side by side. But decree after decree was issued which tightened the Soviet control over the canonical courts and placed stringent limitations on their competence. During the last months of 1922, the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan Republic published a decree ordering the retrial in peoples' courts of lawsuits which had been tried in canonical courts if one of the parties to a dispute petitioned for transfer of the case within one month of the decision. The effect of this decree was devastating to the prestige of the Shariat courts. In 1923 the Government transferred the financial burden of maintaining these courts from the State budget directly to the shoulders of those local citizens who favored the continuation of these courts. Further limitations were enacted, and by 1926 the last Shariat courts in the territory of the Turkestan Republic disappeared. The *coup de grace* was delivered in 1927 by the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R., which ordered the complete divorce of all existing Muslim courts from the Soviet State and forbade the creation of new ones.⁶

The third stroke was directed against Muslim education. It must always be remembered that Czarist Russia erected very few secular schools for the education of her Muslim subjects, the burden of education falling

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-237, for more detailed information.

upon the Muslims themselves. For instance, only 97 schools run by the Czarist Government, with space for less than 3,000 children, were available to the native population of Turkestan, while 7,290 *maktabs* provided elementary education for 69,864 children and 375 *madrassas* had an enrollment of 9,627 students receiving instruction in the "Arab sciences."⁷ Thus, whatever the shortcomings of Muslim education might have been, it constituted the very basis of education for the Islamic population and represented a valiant community effort. Communist dogma of complete separation of church and state could not permit education to remain in the hands of the Muslim authorities. The Soviets established free state schools in all towns and most of the villages, and by 1921 they had enrolled more than 84,000 pupils, compared with less than 3,000 under the Czarist regime. Temporary disability to pay for this expanded program of education forced them to retrench and to permit Muslim schools to continue. But the respite was of short duration. The attacks against the waqf, the endowed property on which many Muslim schools subsisted, were resumed. Thus, their economic support being undermined, many of these schools were forced to close their doors. Despite these crippling blows, over 250 of them still operated legally in Central Asia in 1927. During the period of the Five-Year Plans, the Soviet Government confiscated the remaining endowment properties, which put an end to Muslim institutions of higher learning. Despite these formidable attacks against the foundation of customary Islamic life, they did not lead to large-scale abandonment of religion by Muslims, and even individual cases of apostasy were relatively rare.

Anti-Religious Propaganda

As mentioned before, the freedom of religious worship and the freedom of anti-religious propaganda are both recognized rights of every citizen of the U.S.S.R. Yet, there is a flaw in this apparently bright picture. While religious worship and the continuation of religious services depend completely on the spiritual strength and the material support of the congregation, the anti-religious propaganda is carried on with the full support of the Government, if not directly, still by Government-sponsored organizations with unlimited funds at their disposal.

The Soviet policy toward Islam has shown that the pledges of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. are nothing but hollow phrases. The full vigor

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238. Also see *Ibid.*, p. 238, footnote No. 71: "From a report by Khidyr-Aliev to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee . . . (Moscow, 1924), pp. 105-6."

of Soviet laws and the power of the Soviet Government is used to suppress religion and to oppress its conscientious followers.

Early in the war against religion two publishing houses were established in Moscow: *Bezbozhnik* (Godless) and *Ateist* (Atheist).⁸ Their sole purpose was to undermine religion by any means available: ridicule, scorn, false accusations, and so-called scientific discoveries which seem to counter the claims of religion. This anti-religious propaganda was led by the "Society of Militant Atheists," a Government controlled and financed organization.

A good share of their activities was directed against Islam. It is impossible to give a full description of the countless publications and articles distributed through their efforts. Only a few of the more significant will be mentioned here.

Their first challenge to Islam was in the form of articles in periodicals and occasional brochures. For instance, in *Zhizn Natsionalnostey* (The Life of the Nationalities) an article appeared in 1920, "The Koran and the Revolution." It was intended to expose the class character of Islam and the treacherous and anti-popular activities of Muslim leaders.

More specifically concerned with Islamic matters was the periodical *Novyy Vostok* (The New East), which appeared in 1922 and lasted until 1930. It contained a considerable amount of factual material besides highly subjective and biased articles, but apparently the editors were unable to turn the magazine into the required political weapon, and it ceased to exist.

The anti-Islamic propaganda of the early period was mostly disseminated in the Russian language; however, in 1925 a magazine called *Fen-em-Din* (Science and Religion) appeared in the Tatar language. It followed closely the line of the *Bezbozhnik* publications, thus spreading atheistic ideas and theories in Bashkiria and the Soviet East.

One of the most prolific writers against Islam is Prof. Lucian I. Klimovitch. Among the titles of his books and articles are: "The Contents of the Koran" (1928), in which he claimed to expose all the internal contradictions of the Qur'an and in which he also asserted that the Qur'an was written in the interest of religious exploiters, to whom the exploited were required to submit unconditionally while being deceived by vague hopes of future delight.

⁸ *Islam and Russia: A detailed analysis of An Outline of the History of Islamic Studies in the USSR* by N. A. Smirnov, with an introduction by Ann K. S. Lambton, p. 42.

U. S. S. R., TERRITORIES WITH LARGE MUSLIM POPULATIONS



U. S. S. R., TERRITORIES WITH LARGE MUSLIM POPULATIONS



An article from his pen appeared in the *Ateist*, No. 53, 1930: "Hajj (Pilgrimage), the Vampire of Islam." In 1931 he published an article on Kurban-Bayram (the feast of sacrifice), and in 1933 a brochure entitled "Against Uraza" (fasting). In all of these he vehemently attacks the Muslims and what they consider holy, labelling their feasts and customs as reactionary and poisonous. It is interesting to note that Klimovitch's first book on the "Contents of the Koran" was reissued in 1956 by the All-Union Society for the Diffusion of Political and Scientific Knowledge, the new name for the former Society of Militant Atheists. In 1930 V. Shokhor published an article on "The Holy Month of Ramadhan," in which he ridicules the Muslim rite.

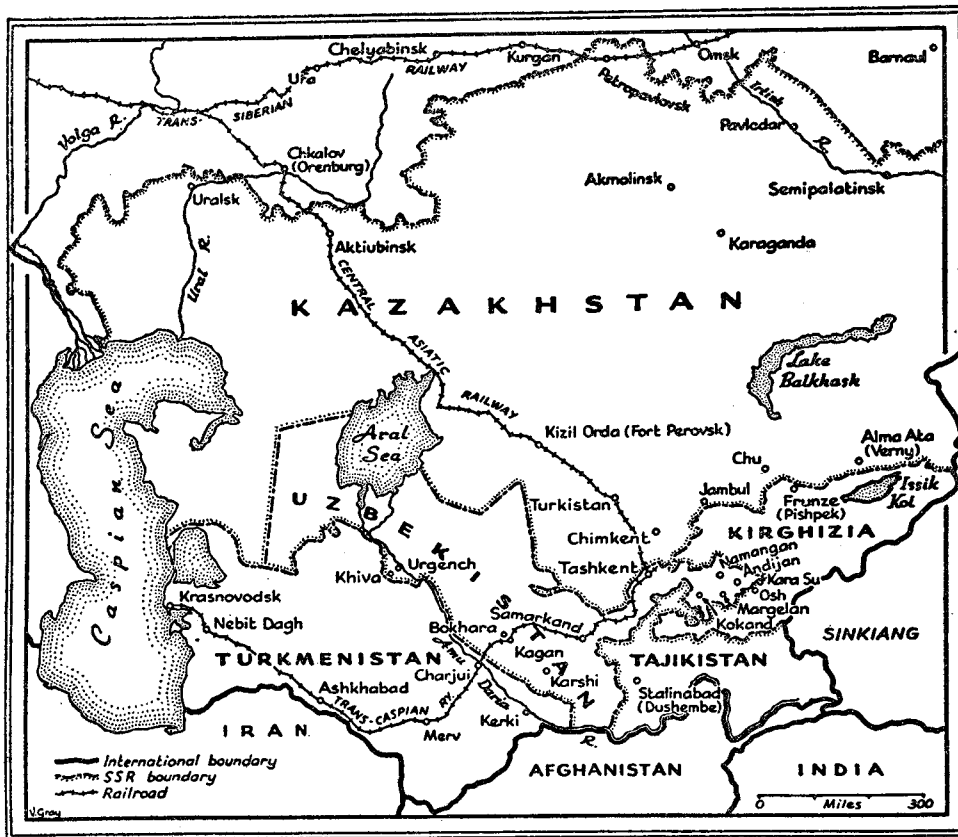
Other authors went further than merely ridiculing or slandering Islam. They denied the very existence of the prophet Muhammad. N. A. Morozov, for example, in his work on *Christ* (1930), declares in the chapter "Whence Comes Islam," that Islam is an offshoot of Arianism evoked by a meteorological event in the Red Sea area near Mecca. "The Arabian Peninsula is incapable of giving birth to any religion—it is too far from normal areas of civilization. The Arian Islamites, who passed in the Middle Ages as Agars, Ishmaelites, and Saracens, were indistinguishable from the Jews until the impact of the Crusades made them assume a separate identity. *All the lives of Muhammad and his immediate successors are as apocryphal as the accounts of Christ and the Apostles.*"⁹ Morozov's denial that Muhammad had ever existed had a considerable influence on Soviet Islamic studies, particularly on Klimovitch.

S. P. Tolstov propounds that the myth of Muhammad has much in common with the central myths of many religions; he finds parallels in the deified shamans of the Yakuts and the Buryats, and then continues to say that the social purpose of this myth was to check the disintegration of the political block of traders, nomads, and peasants which had brought the new feudal aristocracy to power. I. N. Vinnikov writes in a similar vein in *The Legend of the Call of Muhammad in the Light of Ethnography*.

These are by no means obscure writers; they are authorities highly respected in the field. One may imagine what the legion of local propaganda writers are grinding out against Islam when the men at the top make such assertions. The atheistic and anti-Islamic propaganda line is continually emphasized in the native language newspapers of the Islamic peoples and over their radio stations broadcasting in the vernacular. This type of propaganda against Islam and religion in general continued in varied degrees of strength until the outbreak of World War II.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48. Italics ours.

ISLAMIC REPUBLICS



SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

Apparent Change of Policy During World War II

During the last war the Soviet Government found it expedient to relax its pressure on the religious groups. An agreement was concluded between the Government and the Muslim religious leaders in which the Communists promised not to harm Islam and not to interfere with the conduct of religious services. The Muslims on their part would pledge to support the fight against the foreign invader. In 1942 instructions were received permitting Muslims to reopen their mosques and religious schools. Religious leaders who had been exiled to concentration camps in Siberia and who were still alive were brought back from their banishment. Thus, the religious bodies in the U.S.S.R. gained a respite, a truce at least, with the hope of a permanent agreement of peaceful co-existence in the future. The Soviets made the people believe that the past would be forgotten and would never return. They promised to fulfill these agreements faithfully. At this time they also allowed the establishment of "Chief Muslim Religious Administrations." Ufa became the seat of the Chief Religious Administration of Muslims in Central Russia and Siberia, Tashkent became the administrative center for Muslims in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, and a similar body was organized in Transcaucasia with jurisdiction over Azerbaijan. However, the *muftis*, the heads of each administrative unit, were appointed by the Communists and not elected by the Muslims of the area. Thus, the direction of all Muslim affairs remained under the strict control of the Government.

While these measures were pointing toward a new relationship between the Soviet Government and her Muslim subjects, this same Government of Moscow perpetrated the most heinous crimes against whole Muslim groups. It is true that during the war a number of Muslims proved to be undependable and sided with the invaders. This, however, does not justify the extinction of whole peoples. That fate befell the Chechen, Ingush, Balkar, and Karachai Republics in the Caucasus in 1944. A large number were butchered on the spot and the survivors, about 600,000, were deported to Siberia, where hunger, disease, cold, and hard labor took their heavy toll. A similar treatment was meted out to the Crimean Tatars, who were totally uprooted. Their lands were settled by Slavs, and the whole Crimea annexed to the Ukrainian Republic. This took place while the Soviet delegates at the San Francisco Conference made pious declarations on the rights of man, self-determination, religious freedom, and human decency. The world heard nothing about these peoples for many years, except rumors of their fate. Then almost thirteen years later in 1957, during the Sixth Session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.,

a resolution was passed for the return of the deported Muslim peoples to their native lands. Thus the fate which had befallen these unfortunates became known. This resolution, however, has little practical significance. The bulk of the exiles are dead, and those who were fortunate enough to survive and are able to return will find their lands occupied by Slavs. The resettlement will take about three years, according to Soviet sources. This resolution was passed mainly for propaganda reasons in order to impress and to beguile the Muslims outside the Soviet orbit, attempting to prove that times had changed and that the Communists were really friends of the Muslims and of Islam.

Until World War II the majority of the population of Soviet Central Asia, in rural as well as in urban areas, was Muslim and of either Turkic or Iranian origin. This is no longer the case in such key centers as Tashkent, Ashkhabad, Alma Ata, and others. Immediately following World War II, the Soviets dispatched many Slavs and other non-Muslim elements to these cities, so that as early as 1952 the Slavic element outnumbered the native population and the key posts in the administrative system were in the hands of Russians. Furthermore, in the famous Khrushchev program for the cultivation of the "Virgin Lands" in Central Asia, thousands of *Komsomol* members (Young Communist League), who constitute the ablest of Soviet youth picked for leadership qualities and absolute loyalty to the Soviet regime, were sent to Kazakhstan. Between April and June in 1956, Khrushchev made other appeals for 500,000 of the *Komsomol* members to settle in these regions. In addition to the *Komsomol* colonists, in 1955 the Soviet Government dispatched whole regiments of demobilized soldiers and their officers to the Central Asian Republics to cultivate virgin and idle land; at the same time they were, of course, useful in augmenting the Slavic part of the population and could be mobilized for defensive or offensive purposes at a moment's notice.

The Number of Muslims in the Soviet Union

It is most difficult to ascertain the size of the present Muslim community in Soviet Russia. A French publication about "Muslims in the World" issued by the "Centre des Hautes Etudes d'Administration Musulmane," says the exact number of Muslims in the U.S.S.R. is impossible to determine but, according to figures published in the large Soviet Encyclopedia of 1948, it comes to the conclusion that 21,000,000 would be about right but warns that this figure might contain a wide margin of error.¹⁰

¹⁰ La Documentation Française. Direction de la Documentation. *Les Musulmans dans le Monde*, No. 1.642. Paris, August 9, 1952, pp. 32-35.

However, Muslim refugees from Soviet Russia believe that there may be as many as 40,000,000 Muslims in Soviet Russia.

Ivar Spector in his work mentions the figure of 30,000,000.¹¹ After the war mufti Babakhan gave the figure of 13,000,000 to an American newspaper columnist, and during the International Islamic Colloquium held in Lahore as recently as January, 1958, the Soviet Delegate, Mr. Markov, mentioned the figure of 8,000,000 to a western delegate. The figure of 40,000,000 is definitely too high, while the last mentioned seems unbelievably low. One trembles to speculate on what might have happened to the lost millions, if Markov's figure should prove to be correct.

Return to Pre-War Policy

The relaxation of the fight against Islam and the Muslim religious leaders ended with the victorious termination of the war. The Muslim religious leaders were given to understand that their future work would only be tolerated if they would obediently fulfill the Government's wishes. The clergy had the choice of either refraining from religious activity altogether or of submitting to the demands of the regime. Many members of the Religious Administrations refused to work under such conditions and returned to private life. Others decided to make use of the opportunity offered, however small, to serve their faith and their people. Upon such compromise is built the relationship between the Communists and the present Muslim leaders among the Muslim communities in Soviet Russia. Most of these Muslim leaders are fully aware of the fact that the Communists have been, and will remain, enemies of Islam and the Muslims. But it may be argued that although they are hampered on all sides and their activities extremely limited, the very fact that they exist will keep the ideal of Islam alive and will preserve the spirit of Islam amidst the barbaric materialism of Communism. To save their own people from disintegration and destruction they embarked on a program of collaboration. The price they have to pay is high. The Communists do not miss an opportunity to exploit them for their own political ends, especially in the field of foreign relations and propaganda. They are forced to call upon Muslims to support various Communist propaganda activities aimed at deceiving the outside world. For example, when the well-known "Stockholm Peace Plan" was launched, the Muslim religious leaders were bound to call upon their fellow Muslims to sign the appeal. Quite frequently some

¹¹ Spector, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

of them are chosen to represent the Muslims of Soviet Russia at international conferences where delegations from the free Muslim world also meet. Their task is to affirm as forcefully as possible that the Communists are friends of the Muslims, that they have brought them greater benefits than they ever had under any previous regime, and that Communism is also a way of life ordained by God. Whether it is worth paying this price in the name of Islam is, of course, open to debate.

Communitic Indoctrination Intensified

In this postwar period the fight against religion and Islam is being conducted in a more subtle way. Formerly it was directed by the "Society of Militant Atheists," as mentioned before. Now this society has taken on a more respectable garb and calls itself the "All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge." But the basic purpose, as well as the goal, are the same. In addition, in each Muslim republic there exists an "Administration of Cultural Affairs" with branches in practically every village. This organization has a sub-section devoted to anti-religious propaganda. As in the past, the Government provides all the necessary funds for this kind of activity.

During the life of Stalin the struggle against Islam continued without respite. After his death in 1953 many Muslims expected a change for the better. They hoped for a new era and a cessation of recriminations and persecution. These hopes did not come true; they were just a mirage in the desert. Nine months after Stalin's death (December 11), Khrushchev, the new leader of the Communist Party, issued a decree published in *Pravda*, which presented the future policy of the Soviet Government toward religion, including Islam. In this decree Khrushchev demanded not the relaxation but the intensification of Communist education of the peoples of the U.S.S.R. He proposed new methods for anti-religious teaching and insisted that religion must receive its death blow, and the influence of Islam and that of other faiths upon the peoples of the U.S.S.R. must be eradicated forever. Only then would the work be crowned with success.

This decree has been in effect in Russia ever since. Anti-religious work has been intensified in the Muslim republics. Atheistic ideas and concepts are disseminated among all strata of the population, their poison is spread among old and young, men and women. Not even children of kindergarten age are spared.

To give a few examples: *Pravda* stated on November 17, 1954, that in all regions of the U.S.S.R. inhabited by Muslims, additional cadres

of lecturers had been organized to propagate anti-religious subjects. These lecturers are drawn from the intellectual professions—teachers, engineers, students. Their work is directed by special departments for anti-religious propaganda existing in the different Soviet Administrations. The majority of these lecturers are either *Komsomol* or full-fledged Communist Party members. A brigade of lecturers is sent out to work in every district, town, and village. They are to visit the homes of workers and employees, schools, offices, and collective farms and are even to go out into the fields where the peasants labor, to lecture them on the evils of religion.

Everybody is supposed to attend and to listen. However, frequently people pretend to be ill. Or they leave home hastily and hide when learning in time that a lecture is going to take place since it is inadvisable to leave such a lecture after it has started. Very unpleasant consequences might follow, the least of which is being regarded as an “unreliable element” by the authorities. Although quite often these lectures are announced as scientific discussions on a purely scientific subject, they turn into violent attacks on ideas and customs Muslims hold sacred.

Facts prove that this anti-religious campaign is being stepped up in all regions inhabited by Muslims. For instance in Kazakhstan, still a strong center of Islam, during the period of intensive Government indoctrination, whole teams of lecturers arrived to give anti-God lectures.¹² Similar methods were used in Azerbaijan, in Tadzhikistan, and other Muslim republics.

In larger localities permanent anti-religious museums have been reopened. Usually they are housed in former mosques, religious academies, or historic buildings closely linked with Islamic culture. Permanent anti-religious exhibits are staffed by persons capable of lecturing, while smaller communities are served by mobile exhibitions.

A permanent anti-religious exhibit was opened in Baku in October, 1955.¹³ It is housed in a large building in one of Baku's main streets and has various sections, such as “Islam and Science,” “Islam and Communist Ideology,” and others stressing the anti-scientific and reactionary character of Islam. This is the main theme of the present drive against religion: religion is hostile to science, religion has set wrong goals, religion is a reactionary force, its doctrines are but superstitions.

Titles like these—“How Did Religion Begin and What Does It Signify?,” “What Is Religion?,” “Scientific Ideals Are Opposed to Reli-

¹² *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, August 5, 1955.

¹³ *Bakinsky Rabochy*, October 12, 1955.

gion"—have been published in the years 1955 and 1956 and are distributed by the thousands in regions inhabited by Muslims.

The attack is directed especially against the young; children in the most elementary grades are included. Not so long ago the Leningrad branch of the "Society for Dissemination of Scientific and Technical Knowledge" issued a book, "How to Organize Atheist Propaganda Among Children." This work contains instructions on how to implant atheistic ideas in the minds of children and how to avoid any possibility of the adoption of spiritual principles, ethical principles, and any concept of God. The desired educational goal is to make both intellect and sentiment wholly submissive to the objectives of Communism. It goes to show that the Communists are ruthlessly pushing toward their avowed goal and have no respect for parents and their right to bring up their children on a basis of religious conviction and ethics, if they so desire.

The same line is pursued by the newspapers. In the *Bakinsky Rabochy* of May 10, 1956, a paper published for Azerbaijan readers, appeared an article entitled "To Strengthen Anti-Religious Work and Education in the Spirit of Communism," in which a definite appeal was made to overcome and uproot the influence of Islam. In the issue of April 6, 1956, of the *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, an article described how numerous lectures were being organized in the towns and villages of Tadjikistan, during which the speakers would attack Islam and tear down its philosophy. The article demanded that younger people should be obliged to attend these talks.

In May, 1956, a book was published in the Turkmen language entitled *Atheist Education of Children* which gives special directions on how to organize anti-religious activities among Muslim children. In the January issue of *Molodoi Kommunist* in 1957, an article called for the intensification of anti-religious work among children, praising this kind of activity as "important government work." And in February, 1957, a resolution was adopted by the Central Committee of the *Komsomols* of the U.S.S.R. in Moscow, calling for intensification of anti-religious activities among children, requesting the *Komsomol* youth organizations to publish and to distribute more anti-religious literature, to organize more frequent lectures on anti-religious subjects, and to increase their influence upon young people in preventing them from attending religious services. And as recently as May 22, 1958, Professor L. I. Klimovitch attacked the Muslim faith over Radio Moscow, condemning its basic concepts and its sacred rites. He said:

“These remnants of the distant past must not exist in our socialist state. It is clear, comrades, that under our conditions Islam, like any other religion, is a remnant of a society which the Soviet people have left far behind.”¹⁴

A rather clear indication that the state will not rest until this “remnant” also is extinct.

These few examples, which could be increased by hundreds, will suffice to show that the Communists have not changed their attitude towards religion. They may change tactics, they may at times be more harsh and ruthless and at times more lenient, but their basic attitude has not changed, their goal has remained the same—the complete elimination of religion. Whatever they disseminate over the radio about freedom of religion or freedom of conscience, especially to the uncommitted part of the Muslim world is nothing *but* propaganda.

Model Mosques

This so-called freedom of religion is based on the fact that the Soviet Government allocates certain funds for the needs of the various “Religious Administrations,” among them the “Muslim Religious Administrations.” The funds provided, however, are so small that they are insufficient to meet even the most modest demands for the repair of mosques and other expenses connected with religious activities. Thus, in each larger town only the largest mosque receives a grant, while others, if they still exist, are allowed to fall into decay. One such “model” mosque is needed to show foreigners that religious freedom is practiced in the U.S.S.R. For example, there were over fifty mosques in Bokhara before Communist rule; today only one has been preserved. Mosques in rural areas are in a bad state and nothing is done to repair them. When the local people collected voluntary contributions for the preservation of their mosques, they were forbidden to use the funds for this purpose, it being labelled as “unproductive.”

The price for furnishing such funds is the compliance of the clergy with Communist propaganda requirements. Quite often in recent years members of the Religious Administrations were sent to attend meetings or congresses in free Muslim countries such as Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Pakistan. Being on a Government mission, they are required

¹⁴ Wiley, John C. “Letters to The Times.” *New York Times*, June 9, 1958, Section 1, p. 22. See also: “Moscow Radio Assails Religion of Moslems.” *New York Times*, May 23, 1958, Section 1, p. 3.

to praise the freedom of religion in Russia. They must play the same role when visitors from the free world come to the U.S.S.R.

For example, in October, 1956, an Indonesian delegation visited the Soviet Union and was given an opportunity to travel in the Muslim Republics. During their visits to Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan, the Indonesian visitors were introduced to the religious personalities of the principal Religious Administrations of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The latter were introduced as members of the clergy, who had the right to carry out independent activities. The Indonesians also went to the mosques, but nobody was there to tell them that these very same mosques had recently been reopened and only a few years ago any Muslim who dared to carry out a religious service near a mosque—he would have been unable to get inside one—would have been arrested as an enemy of the Soviet regime. There was nobody to tell them that thousands of mosques had been closed and many completely destroyed by the Communists, nor did they learn that many mullahs who formerly served these mosques had been tortured and killed by their hosts.

Shortly before the Indonesian visit the Crown Prince of Yemen, Saif al-Islam Muhammad al-Badr, visited the capital of Azerbaijan. He was allowed to carry out a religious service in the famous Tazapir mosque in Baku, but of course the Prince and his company were not told that only a few years ago an anti-religious exhibition had been installed in the halls of this beautiful mosque. They did not realize that the mosque was reopened only for tactical reasons in order to win the respect and friendship of the yet uncommitted Muslims. Not long ago Azerbaijanis passing this mosque were afraid to glance at it because such a glance might get them into trouble if it were noticed by Communist agents. Today it is shown to foreign visitors as a proof of Communist religious tolerance.

Religious personalities among the Muslims of the U.S.S.R. are often requested to read prepared speeches over the radio in which strong appeals are made to Muslims of other nations. For example, the Chairman of the Religious Administration of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, mufti Ishan Babakhan, delivered a speech directed to the Arabs over the Moscow radio.¹⁵ In this speech he praised the Communist regime and stressed that freedom of religion existed in the U.S.S.R. He also lauded the Communists as enemies of colonialism. This speech by the mufti was not mentioned in newspapers published in the languages of the Muslim peoples of the U.S.S.R. Only *Tass*, the news agency of the Soviet Union, had a short notice reporting that mufti Ishan Babakhan had broadcast an appeal

¹⁵ *Tass*, February 25, 1957.

over the Moscow radio in Arabic to the Muslims of Arab countries. The silence of the other papers was not an oversight; the Soviet Government knew that the Muslims of Russia would immediately detect the falsehoods in this appeal and realize that the mufti had been forced to tell lies to the Arabs. But the speech, having been delivered in Arabic, could not have been understood by the Muslims of the U.S.S.R. who speak different languages. Thus there was no danger of repercussions on the home front.

This same mufti of Turkestan, Ishan Babakhan, was forced in 1953 to publish an article on Stalin's death. In this article, published in the newspaper *Pravda Vostoka*, he wrote: "The death of Stalin is a great loss to mankind." He praised Stalin as "the friend and teacher of the human race." Of course, Ishan Babakhan was perfectly aware of the inhuman liquidations which took place during Stalin's dictatorship. He knew, that on Stalin's orders, thousands of Muslim religious teachers and imams had been killed and thousands of mosques closed. He knew that on Stalin's orders the crime of genocide was perpetrated against the Muslims of the northern Caucasus and the Crimea. Ishan Babakhan himself was in a Siberian concentration camp until the religious amnesty of 1942, when, under the adverse circumstances of the war, the Soviets granted a certain measure of freedom in the administration of religious duties among the Muslims and placed mufti Babakhan at the head of the Religious Administration of the Muslims of Turkestan.

During the month of Ramadan in 1956, Akhmedian Mustaphin, the mullah of the mosque in Moscow, was instructed to make an appeal to his Muslim brothers not to celebrate *Uraz Bairam*, 'Id al Fitr; in other words, he was obliged to speak against the tenets of his own faith, which he is supposed to uphold. What conflicts of conscience these men undergo no one, who has not been confronted with similar problems, will be able to comprehend fully.

The mullahs and members of the Muslim Administrations are under the strict control of the authorities and cannot make any public appearances without permission. During religious services secret agents are always present, listening and taking notes of all that is said. The surveillance of the mullahs and the religious life of Muslims is in the hands of the "Council of Religions and Cults," attached to one of the ministries of the U.S.S.R.

The Soviet Union has made Tashkent the center of Islamic studies, and at its university the Qur'an and theology are studied for one day a week. On the other days political science, especially Marxism and dialectical materialism, are taught intensively, as well as scientific and technical

subjects. The hope of the Communists, of course, is that the intensive pre-occupation with scientific subjects will, in the end, completely dominate interest in the religious teachings of Islam and that finally Islam will be referred to only as ancient, petrified folklore.

How Well Did the Communists Succeed?

Despite these manifold efforts of the Communists a large number of the Muslims in the U.S.S.R. have remained believers. The Communists have not yet been able to destroy Islam. Not only has Islam been preserved in the hearts of the older generation, but it has deep roots among the young, even though they have been exposed during their whole lifetime to atheistic propaganda.

The *Komsomolskaya Pravda* of December 22, 1955, laments that in the towns of Turkmenistan many people still go to the mosques and celebrate religious holidays, not only men and women of the older generation, but even school children and young people in the *kolkhozes* (collective farms). Also, weddings are still frequently celebrated according to religious custom. Therefore, the paper concludes, anti-religious propaganda should be intensified and more attention should be given to the private life of Soviet citizens. Similar reports appear quite often in the papers. It is obvious that the Communist press would not pay any attention to this matter if it concerned only isolated cases.

From October 29 to November 4, 1956, a conference was held in Stalinabad, the capital of Tadzhikistan, under the aegis of the Institutes of Ethnography and Material History of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. Among other subjects, the problem of "religious survivals in the mores of the peoples of Central Asia" was taken up. Several papers by eminent Soviet scholars were read. G. P. Snesev's report (Institute of Ethnography) was published in full in *Sovyetskaya Etnografiya* (1957, No. 2, pp. 60-72). All papers acknowledged the extraordinary vitality of Muslim religious beliefs and admitted the failure of more than twenty years of intensified anti-Muslim propaganda. Although, as Snesev writes, orthodox Islam has become rapidly debilitated and the number of persons observing the fast and the other festivals as well as those with a knowledge of Arabic diminishes from year to year, nevertheless, "a religious movement is being born before our very eyes in the regions where Islam was once widespread. This movement strives to adapt the religion to present conditions; it accepts every compromise and attempts to modernize Muslim dogmas." He sees the reason for the survival of Islam in the strong bonds

of the family and the clan system, and therefore he proposes that the traditional structure of Muslim society must be destroyed, the clans must be disbanded and dispersed, before the last traces of Islam are eradicated. This must be accomplished even at the cost of destroying all the old villages and erecting new ones with a completely different social structure.

The fact that newspapers and scientific conferences are evidently deeply concerned about the tenacity of Islam is proof that the spirit of the Muslim peoples is not broken. Islam is deeply rooted in the hearts of the Muslims of Russia, and as long as it stays alive, the Muslims will never become *uskodels* (confirmed Communists). At present the Communist leaders show a certain amount of tolerance towards Islam in order to influence the Muslims outside the Soviet Union. The moment they feel that they have reached this goal in convincing foreign Muslims, or, if they should discover that their present policy is of no avail, it seems obvious from past experience that they would not hesitate to use the old strong arm methods of suppression, torture, and murder against the Muslims.

The fate of the Muslims in the Soviet Union and the sacrifices they have made in the defense of Islam should serve as a stern warning for all Muslims living in free countries. The sufferings they endure are the sufferings of all Muslims and will be the lot of all those who are neglectful of their duties as Muslims, allowing thereby the Communists with their Godless philosophy to infiltrate their society and their country. The Muslims in the free countries must understand that Communism not only brings them the most terrifying form of colonialism, but also destroys their religious and cultural life and aims at the complete extermination of Islam.

ومن اظلم ممن منع مساجد الله ان
يذكر فيها اسمه، وسعى في خرابها

"Who is more wicked than he who prohibits God's name from being remembered in His houses of worship and he who hastens to destroy them."

—*Qur'an, Surah al Baqara (the Cow), verse 114*

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