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Freedom of Religion in the U.S.S.R.



Alexius, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

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Religion in Russia before the Revolution

THE position of religion in pre-revolutionary Russia was as follows. The Orthodox Christian faith was the dominating, official State religion in Russia. All other faiths were either persecuted or simply "tolerated". The citizens were not free to profess any religion they wished. Conversion from one faith to another was also hindered, unless it was conversion to Orthodox Christianity, which was encouraged.

Conversion from Christianity to non-Christian faiths was punished by hard labour. Atheism was considered one of the gravest crimes against the State. Persons entering into marital relations not solemnised by the Church were persecuted, and children born out of wedlock were considered "illegitimate" and denied full citizenship rights.

The Russian Orthodox Church, as the dominant church, enjoyed advantages and privileges denied to the other religions. The Russian Orthodox Church was headed by the tsar himself. This subordination of the Church to the tsar was reflected in the basic laws of the State. The role of the tsar in relation to the Church was formulated as follows: "The emperor, as a Christian monarch, is the supreme defender and guardian of the dogmas of the dominating faith, and the patron of the true faith and of all the sacraments in the Holy Church."

The Church had in its possession tremendous wealth in the form of movable property and real estate, and vast tracts of land; it was a big capitalist and landlord exploiting the workers and peasants. The tsarist government used the Orthodox Church and its servants to oppress the people and charged the clergy with police functions. The priests were commanded to report facts concerning the political unreliability of particular citizens which they had learned from confessions.

National oppression in autocratic Russia went hand in hand with religious persecution of the peoples in the borderlands who did not adhere to the Russian Orthodox Church. The "heterodox", as all those who did not belong to the Russian Orthodox Church were called, were discriminated against in the various services and in the schools.

Thus, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, did not exist in tsarist Russia. That is why one of the basic demands put forward by the advanced representatives of Russia in the struggle against tsarist autocracy was the demand for freedom of conscience, for the separation of the Church from the State and of the school from the Church, i.e., the demand for freedom of religion.

As long ago as 1883, when the "Emancipation of Labour" group—the first Russian Marxist group—was organised, it put forward the demand for "unrestricted freedom of conscience" and complete equality of all citizens "irrespective of religion and tribal origin".

The programme of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, written by Lenin in 1902, also advanced the demand for the abolition of estates and for the full equality of citizens, irrespective of sex, religion and race. This programme demanded the separation of the Church from the State and of the school from the Church.

Soviet State Legislation on Religion

THE Great October Socialist Revolution did away with the old relations between the State and the Church.

The question of the freedom of religion and of the attitude of the Soviet State toward religious societies was fundamentally solved by the Decree issued by the Soviet Government on January 23, 1918, on the separation of the Church from the State and of the school from the Church.

This document declares:

"1. The Church is separated from the State.

"2. It is forbidden to issue on the territory of the Republic any local laws or ordinances which would hinder or restrict freedom of conscience, or establish any advantages or privileges depending upon the religious beliefs of citizens.

"3. Every citizen may profess any religion or none at all. All restrictions of the rights of citizens because of their worship in any religion, or non-adherence to any faith, shall be abolished.

"*Note.* Every reference to the religion or irreligion of citizens shall be expunged from all official documents.

"4. State functions and any other official public and social functions shall not be attended by any religious rites or ceremonies.

"5. The freedom to perform religious rites is secured to the extent that they do not disturb public order and are not attended by encroachments upon the rights of citizens of the Soviet Republic.

"Local authorities have the right to take all the necessary measures in these cases to ensure the maintenance of public order and security.

"6. No one may use his religious beliefs as an excuse for shirking his civic duties.

"Exceptions to this rule, on the condition that one civic duty is substituted for another, shall in every case be allowed by decision of the People's Court.

"7. Religious vows or oaths are abolished. Only solemn promises shall be made in the necessary cases.

"8. All civic registration functions shall be performed exclusively by the civil authorities: by the marriage and birth registration offices.

"9. The school is separated from the Church.

"Religious instruction is prohibited in all the State and public schools, as well as in all private schools where general subjects are taught."

The Decree on the separation of the Church from the State and of the school from the Church conforms entirely with the directives on questions of religion formulated by the founder of the Soviet State, V. I. Lenin. As long ago as 1905, at the time of the first revolution, V. I. Lenin wrote with reference to this question:

"The state must not be concerned with religion; religious societies should have no connection with the state power. Everybody must be absolutely free to profess any religion he pleases or not to believe in any religion at all—that is, to be an atheist, as every Socialist usually is. No distinction whatever between citizens, as regards their rights, depending upon their religious beliefs, can be tolerated. Every reference to the belief of citizens must be unconditionally expunged from all official documents. There must be absolutely no subsidies to a state church, no grants of government funds to church and religious societies, which must become associations absolutely free and independent of the state, associations of citizens holding the same ideas."

The separation of the Church from the State meant that all religious organisations, and primarily the Russian Orthodox Church, which was part and parcel of the State apparatus in the tsarist monarchy, were relieved of functions which lie outside their realm, and given the opportunity to concentrate all their attention on purely religious questions.

The separation of the Church from the State meant not only that the religious organisations were relieved of functions which lie outside their realm, but also that all citizens were freed from obligatory participation in religious organisations.

The separation of the Church from the State also meant that

the Russian Orthodox Church would no longer be subsidised from the State budget.

It stands to reason that the separation of the Church from the State does not in any way imply that the priests or lay believers are denied the rights of fully-fledged citizens and the opportunity to take an active part in the political life of the country.

On the contrary, the rights of citizens are strictly protected by Soviet legislation which prohibits any restriction of the rights of citizens on account of their religious beliefs.

All the religions existing in the Soviet Union are equal before the State. The State does not grant any privileges to any religion, and the only demand presented to all the religions is that they shall not violate the laws of the country. It is entirely clear that only under these conditions is it possible to speak of real, and not formal, freedom of religion.

The purpose of the activities conducted by the religious organisations in the Soviet Union is to satisfy the specific demands of the religious population. This does not mean that the religious organisations and the clergy keep aloof from the burning questions of interest to all the Soviet people. On their own initiative they have been taking a prominent part in the struggle for peace, urging all their adherents to support the undertakings of the Soviet State and Soviet public intended to secure universal peace, and regarding these activities as a performance of their religious duty.

The most prominent dignitaries and representatives of the priesthoods of all the religions have taken an active part in the U.S.S.R. Peace Conferences and in the peace conferences held in the different republics of the Soviet Union. Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsy and Kolomna is known far beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union for his outstanding contributions to the struggle for peace.

The leaders of the religious societies addressed the peace conferences, speaking on their own behalf and in the name of their congregations.

Thus, addressing the U.S.S.R. Peace Conference in October 1950, Professor I. I. Stankevicius, Canon, Archdiocesan Suffragan of Kaunas and Diocesan Suffragan of Kaisedorys and Vilkaviskis, declared:

"I am happy to bring to this Conference a message from all

the Catholics of Soviet Lithuania. . . .

"The Soviet Union and the people's democracies have already evolved forms of life under which neither differences of language, nor of race, nor of religion, prevent intercourse and mutual assistance between people."

The religious organisations in the Soviet Union do not form their own political groups or parties; they do not conduct any special activities among separate groups of the population—women, youth, children, etc. The State property (houses of prayer and other facilities) placed at the disposal of the religious organisations, is to be used exclusively for the purpose designated. Numerous and varied demands of the population are satisfied by the State organisations, by the trade unions and the co-operative societies which cater for all citizens, irrespective of nationality or religion.

All the religious organisations, without exception, have expressed through their leaders and laity full approval of the established order under which the religious organisations are concerned mainly with the demands of the religious citizens, and under which all religions are equal before the law.

Y. I. Zhidkov, head of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists, wrote as follows on this question in the *Bratsky Vestnik* ("Fraternal Herald"):

"The importance of the October Revolution for us religious people lies in the fact that it has secured freedom for all the religious organisations. It has made them all equal before the law. There is no longer a dominating Church, nor any sectarian apostates; there are only religious people worshipping different faiths who are perfectly free to worship in accordance with the dictates of their conscience. The October Revolution has particularly lightened the lot of all the religious societies of the people, of the communities and individuals called sectarian and *Starobriatsi* [Old Believers], who under the old régime suffered all kinds of persecution and discrimination because of their faith. They have received all the rights essential for freedom of worship and social observance of their religion."

In an interview given to press representatives in July 1951, Sheikh ul-Islam Ali-Zade, President of the Religious Board of Moslems of Transcaucasia, said:

"Before the Revolution the Moslems in our country suffered from religious persecution. All the religions now enjoy equal



Representatives of the clergy at the Third U.S.S.R. Peace Conference, which met recently in the Hall of Columns, Moscow



Moslem religious leaders were among the delegates to the Third U.S.S.R. Peace Conference

rights in the Soviet Union, and the Stalin Constitution guarantees full freedom of religion.

"The mosques and religious communities of Moslems in the Caucasus and Central Asia function freely. Under Soviet government the Moslems have tasted the sweetness of the fruits of education and of a truly high culture.

"The children of ordinary Moslem peasants and workers take a prominent part in the administration of the State, holding the posts of Government Ministers, factory directors and executives in scientific institutions."

Since all the religious organisations are equal before the law, they cannot become dependent upon any other organisations, and this is a reliable guarantee of the freedom they enjoy.

It follows that Soviet legislation and the established rules of socialist intercourse secure the greatest freedom of religion.

Under Soviet laws every citizen is not only free to worship in any religion; he has the right not to worship in any faith and the right to conduct anti-religious propaganda, without fear of any restrictions on his civic rights.

In his interview with the first American workers' delegation, on September 9, 1927, the leader of the Soviet people, J. V. Stalin, answered as follows the questions of the delegation concerning the status of religion in the Soviet Union:

"Our legislation guarantees to citizens the right to adhere to any religion. This is a matter for the conscience of each individual. That is precisely why we carried out the separation of the church from the state. But in separating the church from the state and proclaiming religious liberty we at the same time guaranteed the right of every citizen to combat by argument, by propaganda and agitation any and all religion."

Religious ceremonies and rites in State and public institutions have been abolished in accordance with the Decree on the separation of the Church from the State and the school from the Church. Religious vows or oaths have also been abolished and the civil registration services have been entrusted entirely to the State institutions which register births, marriages and deaths. This notwithstanding, every citizen may, if he so desires, baptise his children, enter into marriage in accordance with the traditions of his religion, etc. But these religious acts have no legal value. They carry no restrictions on the rights of the citizen, but they also carry no privileges. The State regards these

religious acts as the private affair of citizens and does not interfere with them.

No distinctions are drawn on the basis of religion, or between religious persons and atheists, in the factories and offices, in the collective farms and schools and in the army. When a citizen is accepted into employment, when he enters a school or applies for membership in one or another public organisation, no one has the right to ask him for, and he is not obliged to give, any information about his religious beliefs. There are no statistics whatever in the country classing citizens according to religion.

The laws of the Soviet Union prohibit any restrictions of the rights of citizens or persecution for religious beliefs, and any offence to the religious feelings of people. Any persons who tried to interfere with the performance of any religious services would be punished by Soviet laws.

The Decree on the separation of the Church from the State and of the school from the Church freed the peoples of the Soviet Union from any attempts to force one or another faith upon them, and secured to every citizen of the U.S.S.R. full freedom to act in questions of religion in accordance with the dictates of his conscience.

In his Report to the Eighth Congress of Soviets, in 1936 on the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R., J. V. Stalin, speaking of the amendments and addenda suggested during the nationwide discussion of the Draft Constitution, said: "Next follows an amendment to Article 124 of the Draft Constitution, demanding that the article be changed to provide for the prohibition of the performance of religious rites. I think that this amendment should be rejected as running counter to the spirit of our Constitution."

Freedom of religion, proclaimed by the Soviet Government Decree of January 23, 1918, is recorded in Article 124 of the Fundamental Law of the Soviet Union—the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. This article reads: "In order to ensure 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 recognised for all citizens."

III

Separation of Church from State—Reactions of Clergy and Laity

SEPARATION of the Church from the State and of the School from the Church produced different reactions among the clergy and laity of the various religions. It was accorded a favourable reception by a considerable section of the clergy and laity because the Decree did away with the interference of the State authorities in the life of the religious organisations.

Patriarch Sergius of Moscow and All Russia, who was one of the most prominent church leaders and who died in May 1944, wrote:

“The Decree of the Soviet Government on freedom of conscience, on freedom of religious worship, has removed the yoke which weighed upon the Church for many long years, and freed the Church from outside patronage. It has greatly benefited the internal life of the Church. The Decree grants freedom and guarantees the inviolability of this freedom to all religious societies. It is a supreme blessing for our Russian Orthodox Church that it has ceased to be the dominating Church and has ceased to serve in this respect as an instrument in the hands of autocratic government for binding the religious conscience of other faiths.”

Nevertheless, there were individuals, notably among the high dignitaries, who had become so attached to the age-old order of things that in the early years of Soviet Government they persisted in favouring the autocratic system which gave all sorts of privileges and advantages to the Russian Orthodox Church and priesthood. Deprived of these advantages and privileges, they offered bitter resistance to the implementation of the Soviet Government's Decree on the separation of the Church from the State and of the school from the Church. They entered

into a struggle against the Soviet Government, drawing laymen into this struggle. Thus, under the cover of a religious issue, some of the churchmen were actually conducting a political struggle for the restoration of the tsarist monarchy.

The reactionary section of the clergy used lay believers for anti-Soviet, anti-popular purposes. The Soviet Government was therefore obliged to take the necessary steps against the most reactionary representatives of the priesthood. These measures of the Soviet Government were slanderously misinterpreted by the counter-revolutionary elements in the country and abroad as "persecution" of religion, of religious persons, of the Church.

This calumny was refuted by representatives of the Church. Thus, the volume *The Truth About Religion in Russia*, edited by the Metropolitan of Moscow, who subsequently became Patriarch Sergius, and published in 1942, contained the following statement:

"In the years following the October Revolution, trials of churchmen took place more than once in Russia. Why were these ecclesiastical personages put on trial? Solely because, screening themselves with cassock and cross, they carried on anti-Soviet work. Those were political trials, having nothing in common with the purely ecclesiastical life of religious organisations and the purely ecclesiastical activity of individual priests."

The defeat of foreign military intervention and of domestic counter-revolution in the civil war; the success of socialist construction and the supreme loyalty of the people to the Soviet Government—all this could not but exert its influence upon the sentiments of the clergymen who had been vacillating. The wisest and most far-sighted in their midst had been convinced that the undertakings of the Soviet Government had the unanimous support of the people and that they would lose all influence among the people if they continued to struggle against the Soviet Government.

Very soon the biggest religious body in the Soviet Union—the Russian Orthodox Church—adopted the course of active support for the home and foreign policies of the Soviet State.

On July 29, 1927, Metropolitan Sergius, at that time locum tenens of the Patriarchate, issued a declaration, together with other members of the Holy Synod, in which he wrote:

"We want to be Orthodox Christians and at the same time

be conscious of the fact that the Soviet Union is our civic Motherland, that her joys and successes are our joys and successes, and her failures are our failures.

“While remaining Orthodox Christians, we remember that it is our duty to be citizens of the Union not out of fear, but by the dictates of conscience, as the Apostle taught us.”

This statement of Metropolitan Sergius was received with approval by the clergy and laity. It encouraged the development and stimulated the activities of the religious organisations.

IV

Religious Organisations in the Great Patriotic War

IN the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union against the Hitlerite imperialists, all the religious societies of the U.S.S.R., and primarily the Russian Orthodox Church, acted in complete unanimity with all the Soviet people.

The leaders of the many religions had vivid evidence that only the Soviet Government proved strong enough to safeguard the freedom and State independence of the country. It was also obvious that only Soviet government was capable of saving the Russian Orthodox Church which was menaced by the Hitlerite invaders.

The war made it clear to all the religious people that the fascist invaders were exploiting the religious beliefs of the population and the religious organisations for their predatory ends. They used scouts and spies as the servants of the Church, attached icons and crucifixes to tanks and planes in order to persuade religious people not to open fire on these "holy" objects. They forced clergymen to deliver sermons praising the "new order" established by the invaders. All this convinced the clergy and laity that the fascists intended to use the Church to enslave the Soviet people.

The fascists hoped that they would have the support of the religious organisations and believers in the U.S.S.R. But they had made a gross miscalculation. They did not succeed in concealing their real aims and intentions. The plunder and destruction of churches, the murder of clergymen who refused to comply with the demands of the Hitlerite command exposed the criminal plans of the fascists. The German invaders ruined the famous Kiev-Pechersk Abbey, its museums, archives and library, and carried off extremely valuable, unique ancient Church relics.

The invaders ruined the New Jerusalem Monastery at Istra, a unique monument of ancient church architecture built in the seventeenth century on the initiative of Patriarch Nikon.

The fascists ruined and plundered church memorials and

treasures in Novgorod, Staritsa, Rzhev and many other cities. During the war all the religious organisations of the U.S.S.R. gave their unqualified support and assistance to the Soviet Government in the struggle against the enemies of mankind. They conducted extensive patriotic activities, issuing appeals and messages to the congregations, collecting funds for the construction of tanks and planes and for gifts to the men of the Soviet Army, for relief to the orphans and sick and the wounded and disabled.

On the very first day of the war, Metropolitan Sergius, then *locum tenens* of the Patriarchate, addressed a message to the clergymen and laity, declaring:

"At the time when the Motherland calls all the people to heroic exploits, it would not behove us shepherds of the Church to look on in silence at everything that is taking place around us, not to encourage the faint-hearted, not to console the grief-stricken, not to remind the hesitant of their duty and of the will of God. . . . The Church of Christ gives its blessings to all Orthodox Christians defending the sacred borders of our Motherland."

Metropolitan, now Patriarch, Alexius remained in beleaguered Leningrad throughout the blockade which lasted 900 days. He officiated at services and urged the religious citizens to struggle against the enemy, to contribute to the needs of defence. Metropolitan Nikolai took an active part in the work of the Extraordinary State Commission for the investigation of the crimes perpetrated by the Hitlerite invaders on the territory of the Soviet Union.

All other religious societies of the Soviet Union, the Christian Orthodox Church of Georgia, the Armenian Church, the Moslems, Catholics, Protestants, *Starobriatsi* (Old Believers), Baptists and representatives of all other faiths did much to promote the drive for funds and the collection of gifts for the Soviet Army which was discharging its great liberating mission. During the war many representatives of the different religions received personal messages of gratitude from J. V. Stalin for assistance rendered to the Soviet Army.

Since the end of the war the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and all the other religious bodies have been fighting together with all the Soviet people for peace, against the instigators of war, for friendship among all nations.

Freedom of Religion in the Soviet Union

A CONCRETE expression of the freedom of religion prevailing in the Soviet Union is contained in the unhindered performance of religious services and rites.

Services are openly and freely performed by the clergy of all religions—in the Russian Orthodox and Catholic churches, in the chapels and mosques, in synagogues and prayer houses. Bells are rung in all the churches where this is sanctioned by Church traditions. In addition to organised services, clergymen visit the homes of religious citizens on their invitation to hold services or perform required rites.

The Russian Orthodox churches are free to administer baptism, to solemnise marriages and conduct funeral services. The Moslems are free to attend services in the mosques, to observe the Uraza (monthly fast), the Kurban (sacrifice), the Nikah (religious marriages). The Catholics and Lutherans enjoy full freedom to hold confirmations, etc. The same is true of all other religions.

For instance, on Easter holidays, when in accordance with the ancient traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church the believers bring Easter cakes to be blessed at church, large crowds of people may be seen everywhere in front of the churches carrying these cakes.

Freedom of religion in the Soviet Union is concretely expressed in the unhindered publication of religious periodicals and other literature, scriptures, prayer books, manuals for clergymen, church calendars, etc.

Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church is publishing the monthly *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, Christian Orthodox calendars (wall and desk calendars), manuals for clergymen, textbooks for students of the seminaries and religious academies, sermons of Metropolitan Nikolai, etc.

The Russian Orthodox Church in the Struggle for Peace is



The Catholicos of all the Armenians, Patriarch Georg VI, addresses the Second U.S.S.R. Peace Conference in October 1950



Patriarch Alexius talking with Mr. Gerald Bailey (centre) and Mr. Leslie Metcalf, members of British Quakers' delegation. Summer, 1951

the title of a volume published in the Russian, English, French and German languages. Magazines are also published by the Armenian Church and by the Evangelical Christian Baptists. The State printshops produce religious as well as anti-religious publications; the State authorities issue paper for the former as well as for the latter.

Freedom of religion is also expressed in the organisation of ecclesiastical schools by religious societies. The Russian Orthodox Church of the U.S.S.R. maintains two ecclesiastical academies and eight seminaries in different cities. The Catholics, Moslems and Armenians also have their religious schools.

An illustration of the freedom of religion in the Soviet Union is afforded by the existence of some dozens of monasteries and convents; some of these, as for example the Troitse-Sergiev Abbey near Moscow, the Kiev-Pechersk Abbey, the Pochayev Abbey, the Pechersk Monastery of Pskov, are known far beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union. Most monasteries have their own plots of land; the monks and nuns occupy themselves with agriculture or various handicrafts. The monasteries which have no land depend upon the income from donations contributed by their congregations. Thousands of pilgrims flock to the above-mentioned monasteries on great holidays.

In 1951, on July 18, holiday services at the Troitse-Sergiev Abbey were attended by representatives of the Christian Orthodox Churches in other countries who had come to the U.S.S.R. on the invitation of Patriarch Alexius: Alexander III, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East; Patriarch Justinian of Rumania, Metropolitan Kirill of Bulgaria and their attendants. The solemn services attracted large congregations.

On that day the Abbey was visited by many delegations who had come to the Soviet Union from different countries, among them a delegation of British Quakers. The delegates had every opportunity to see religious life in the Soviet Union.

In its report on its visit to the Soviet Union the Quakers' delegation speaks favourably of the freedom of religion in the Soviet Union.

In the Soviet Union, the school is separated from the Church, and the children therefore receive no religious instruction in the schools. The citizens may receive religious training in the prayer houses, where not only are services held, but sermons are delivered and instruction is given, or they may receive

religious instruction privately at home.

The procedure governing the organisation and activities of religious bodies is laid down by laws based on the Decree of January 23, 1918. Groups of citizens, from twenty people upwards, who have come of age, may form religious societies to satisfy their religious interests.

A religious society formed thus receives under agreement with the State a prayer building and other necessities for use free of charge. If a special prayer house is lacking, they are given permission to lease or build an appropriate house.

Religious organisations have the right to lease, purchase or build premises for religious purposes. They acquire means of transportation, set up enterprises for producing canonicals and other necessities, such as, for example, candle shops, icon painting shops, etc.

The religious organisations are voluntary associations of religious people; they depend entirely upon their own incomes derived from voluntary donations of their congregations, from the sale of candles, oil and other objects, and from the fees paid for various services (baptisms, marriages, prayers for the dead, etc.).

Relations between the State and the religious bodies are maintained through two government bodies, the Council for Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Council for Affairs of the Religious Cults (for contact with religious societies other than the Russian Orthodox Church) functioning under the auspices of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. These Councils have authorised representatives in the different regions, territories and republics for maintaining contact between the Soviet authorities and the local religious bodies. They register the communities, arrange for the official transfer of prayer houses to existing, as well as to newly organised, religious communities.

These Councils, which maintain contact between the Government and the religious societies, consider and settle all the problems raised before them by these societies. They draft legislation and decisions relating to the religious societies and see to it that the laws and decisions relating to the religious communities are properly observed. The Councils do not interfere with the internal life of the religious societies or with the canonical and dogmatic aspects of their activities.

The Council for Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Council for Affairs of the Religious Cults take the necessary steps to ensure for the citizens of the Soviet Union the opportunity to exercise the freedom of conscience guaranteed by the Constitution of the U.S.S.R.

This is how the question of freedom of religion and of relations between the State and the Church has been settled in the Soviet Union.

VI

Religious Organisations in the USSR

THE Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches are the largest religious bodies in the Soviet Union, with more than 20,000 functioning churches. The Moscow Patriarchate also has charge of a number of Russian Orthodox parishes abroad—in the U.S.A., China, France, Germany, Belgium and other countries. The Antioch and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches have their representatives in Moscow.

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church is the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, elected in 1945 by the General Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was attended by representatives of all the Christian Orthodox Churches of the world. The Georgian Church is headed by the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia. Functioning under the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia is the Holy Synod. The Metropolitans of Krutitsy (Moscow), Leningrad and Kiev are permanent members of this Synod.

In all their activities connected with the administration of the affairs of the Church, the Patriarch and Holy Synod are guided by the "Statutes on the Administration of the Russian Orthodox Church" adopted by the Church Council in 1945. This document contains all the rules relating to the administration in the centre as well as in the localities—in the eparchies; it specifies the rights and duties of the higher priesthood (the Patriarch and the eparchal archbishops) and parish priests, as well as the rights and duties of the religious communities.

The fact that for the first time in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, its head, Patriarch Alexius, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1945, also illustrates the status of religion in the Soviet Union.

In all the 1,000 years of the existence of the Orthodox Church in Russia, the "most august" and "most pious" rulers

of tsarist Russia could not afford this opportunity to the head of the Church, and it was only with the assistance of the Soviet Government that the Patriarch could satisfy his desire to make a pilgrimage to the places sacred to all Christians.

Islam has the next largest following in the Soviet Union after the Russian Orthodox Church. The religious affairs of the Moslem communities are directed by the mullahs; they are directly responsible to the Muhtasibs elected at conferences of the Moslem priesthood and laity as members of the religious boards.

The religious boards are concerned with the opening of new mosques where the need for them exists; they appoint mullahs and muezzins. These boards take charge of the training of priests in special schools (Madrassah), they issue calendars and other religious publications.

There are four Moslem religious boards in the Soviet Union: at Tashkent (Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic), Ufa (Bashkirian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic), Baku (Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic) and Buinaksk (Daghestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic).

The maintenance of four Moslem religious centres is dictated by geographical and historical conditions, and by the existence of different sects.

In 1945 a large group of Moslem priests and lay believers, headed by Grand Mufti Ishan Babakhan, made a pilgrimage to holy Mecca. This pilgrimage was a very important event in the life of Moslems in the Soviet Union.

Echmiadzin, in the Caucasus, is the historic spiritual centre of the most ancient Armenian Church, which is headed by the Supreme Patriarch-Catholicos of all the Armenians, elected in 1945 by the Council of the Armenian Church which was attended by representatives of Armenian eparchies in other countries.

The Roman Catholic Church, which has a large following in the western districts of the Soviet Union, mainly in the Lithuanian Soviet Republic, is headed by an Archbishop.

There are many Lutheran communities in the Latvian and Estonian Soviet Socialist Republics; these parishes are directed by their own bishops.

The next largest following are those of the *Staroobriatsi*, headed by the Archbishop of Moscow and All Russia, and of

the Evangelical Christian Baptists, headed by an All-Union Council.

The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists maintains relations with similar organisations in foreign countries. Thus, in 1946, representatives of the Council attended Baptist conferences in Sweden and Finland.

The largest following among the other religions in the Soviet Union belongs to the Jewish religion, which has no single religious centre, and to Buddhism, which is widespread in the Buryat-Mongolian Republic where the Buddhist Religious Board has its seat.

In addition to the above-mentioned religious organisations, there are in the Soviet Union organisations with a smaller following: the Seventh Day Adventists, Methodists, Molokane, etc. Irrespective of the number of their followers, they all enjoy equal rights with other religious bodies.

VII

Foreign Delegations' Views on the Status of Religion in the USSR

REPRESENTATIVES of all the Christian Orthodox Churches of the world, as well as representatives of the Anglican and other churches, have visited the Soviet Union in recent years.

They have all had every opportunity to observe the life of the religious organisations in the Soviet Union. In verbal statements and in the press, the Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria, the representatives of the Oecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Archbishop of York and other outstanding church dignitaries paid tribute to the freedom of religion in the Soviet Union.

Many non-church delegations from all countries of the world also had every opportunity to see the position of religion in the Soviet Union. As a rule, most of the delegates attended services or interviewed leaders of religious organisations, ordinary priests and laymen. A British workers' delegation visited the Soviet Union in May 1951. In its report, published in London in 1951, the delegation says the following of the freedom of religion in the U.S.S.R.:

"Religion is free and people practising religion are not punished. There is also freedom for the irreligious. We saw many children in the Orthodox Church and in the Baptist Church. We also saw a few children in the Catholic Church. The religious services are carried out with sincerity and dignity. In Stalingrad two churches which were destroyed have been rebuilt."

John Wilson, one of the members of this delegation, wrote in the same report:

". . . I visited a Baptist Chapel where I was introduced to the pastor, the secretary and two elders. The vestry was stocked with many religious books and the walls were decked with

scriptural texts which I found I knew well. The pastor informed me that there was no interference from the Government, and that they enjoyed perfect liberty in preaching and teaching the Bible. He showed me an Authorised Translation in English and Russian and informed me that this could be obtained from the Soviet Publishing Press in Leningrad. The pastor had this copy, published in 1926, and a hymn book for their own use.

"I asked how many Baptists there were in Russia and he said about 500,000. There were also many churches. I was very interested to hear from him that they were in communication with the Baptist Union in Britain."

An American trade union delegation visited the Soviet Union in July, 1951. Describing its impressions of the Soviet Union, this delegation writes:

"We saw complete freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. In every city we visited we saw both churches and people attending them. In Moscow several of our delegates who are Roman Catholics went to the Roman Catholic Church of Saint Louis on two separate Sundays. As is usual they found the same people there on the second time that they had seen previously. These people explained that they have been going to church in Moscow all their lives, that they attend church regularly and that nobody interfered with their right to attend. . . .

"Jewish synagogues function freely all over the country in addition to Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and other churches. We learned that the place where Jewish culture and religion is most extensively developed is the Jewish National Region of Birobidjan where the Jewish people have their own newspapers and schools and where the Jewish language is taught to children."



The Constitution of the U.S.S.R., which has proclaimed the freedom of religion and the equality of all religions before the law, did away with religious feuds and strengthened friendship among the peoples.

The Soviet people represent a single closely knit multi-national family which is not torn by the contradictions inherent in class society, and by religious feuds in particular.

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