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Freedom of Religion in the USSR

by G. Spasov

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Freedom of Religion in the USSR

Religion in Prerevolutionary Russia

IN prerevolutionary Russia the Orthodox Christian faith was the dominant, official state religion. All other faiths were either persecuted or simply "tolerated." Citizens were not free to profess any religion they wished. Conversion from one faith to another was difficult, except conversion to Orthodox Christianity, which was encouraged.

Conversion from Christianity to non-Christian faiths was punished by imprisonment at hard labor. Atheism was considered one of the gravest crimes against the state. Persons entering marital relations not solemnized by the church were persecuted, and children born of such unions were considered "illegitimate" and denied the full rights of citizenship.

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

The church owned enormous property in the form of real estate and valuables. It operated as a big capitalist and landlord exploiting the workers and peasants. The tsarist government used

the Orthodox Church and its servants in order to oppress the people, and charged the clergymen with police functions. Priests were ordered to report information learned from confessions concerning the political unreliability of certain citizens.

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 Church were called, were discriminated against in the various services and in the schools.

Thus, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion did not exist in tsarist Russia. It is for this reason that one of the basic demands put forward by the advanced representatives of the Russian people in the struggle against tsarist autocracy was the demand for freedom of conscience and the separation of the church from the state and of the school from the church, *i.e.*, the demand for freedom of religion.

The "Emancipation of Labor" group, the first Russian Marxist group, put forward as early as 1883, when it was first organized, the demand for "unrestricted freedom of conscience" and complete equality of all citizens "irrespective of religion or tribal origin."

The program of the Russian Social-Democratic Party written by Lenin in 1902 also advanced the demand for the full equality of citizens, irrespective of sex, religion or race. This program called for the separation of the church from the state and of the school from the church.

Legislation of Soviet State on Religion

THE Great October Socialist Revolution did away with the old relations between the church and the state.

The question of 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 declared that:

"1. The church is separated from the state.

"2. It is prohibited to issue on the territory of the [Soviet] Republic any local laws or ordinances which would hinder or restrict freedom of conscience, or to establish any advantages or privileges dependent 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 all other official, public and social functions shall not be attended by any religious rites or ceremonies.

"5. The freedom to perform religious rites is envisaged 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 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 only 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, *i.e.*, by the marriage and birth registration offices.

"9. The school is separated from the church.

"Religious instruction is prohibited in all 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 is in complete conformity with the directives on questions of religion formulated by the founder of the Soviet State, V. I. Lenin. In 1905, at the time of the first revolution, Lenin wrote with reference to this question:

"The state should not be concerned with religion, nor should religious societies be linked with the state authority. Every person should be completely free to profess whatever religion he pleases or to profess no religion at all—to be an atheist, which every Socialist ordinarily is. No distinction whatsoever is to be made between citizens in respect to their rights as dependent upon their religious faiths. Every reference to the beliefs 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 organizations, and primarily the Russian Orthodox Church, which was an integral part 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 organizations were relieved of functions which



Yelokhovskiy Cathedral in Moscow.

lie outside their realm, but also that all citizens were freed from obligatory participation in religious organizations.

The separation of the church from the state also meant that the Russian Orthodox Church would no longer be subsidized from the state budget.

It stands to reason that the separation of the church from the state does not in any way imply that priests or pious laymen are denied the rights of full-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 because of their religious beliefs.

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

The purpose of the activities conducted by religious organizations in the Soviet Union is to satisfy the specific demands of the religious population. This does not mean that religious organizations and clergymen keep aloof from questions of greatest concern 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 the Soviet people that are intended to secure universal peace, and regarding these activities as a performance of their religious duty.

The most prominent hierarchs and representatives of the priesthood of all religions have taken an active part in the USSR 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 borders of the Soviet Union for his outstanding contributions to the struggle for peace.

Leaders of religious societies have addressed peace confer-



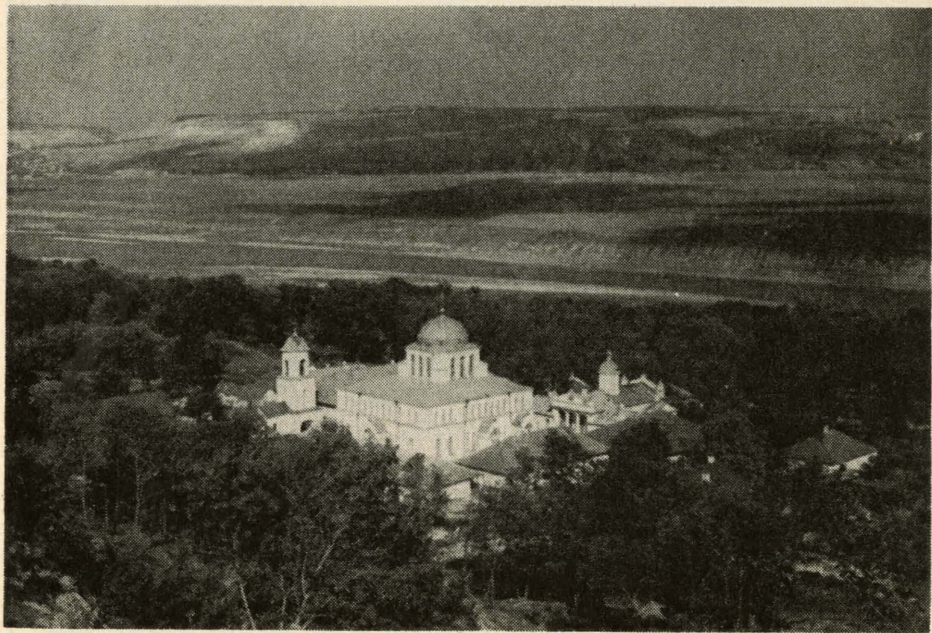
Patriarch Alexius about to cast his vote for deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR.

ences both on their own behalf and in the name of their congregations.

Thus, addressing the USSR Peace Conference in October 1950, Professor I. I. Stankevicius, Canon, Archdiocesan Suffragan of Kaunas, and Diocesan Suffragan of Kaisedorys and Vilkavishkis, 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 evolved forms of life under which differences of language, race and religion do not prevent intercourse and mutual assistance among people."

Religious organizations 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, and so forth. State property (prayer houses and other facilities) placed at the disposal of religious organizations is to be used exclusively for its designated purpose. The numerous



Zhabkovsky Convent on the Dniester River in Soviet Moldavia.

and varied demands of the population are satisfied by the state organizations, the trade unions and the cooperative societies, which serve all citizens, regardless of nationality or religion.

All religious organizations, without exception, have expressed, through their leaders and laity, full approval of the established order, under which religious organizations are concerned mainly with the demands of 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 *Bratsky Vestnik*: "The importance of the October Revolution for us religious people lies in the fact that it has secured freedom to all religious organizations. It has made them all equal before the law. There is no longer a dominant church, nor are there any more 'sectarian apostates'; there are only pious people, professing different faiths, who are perfectly free to worship in accordance with the dictates of their conscience. The October Revolution has especially improved the lot of all the religious societies of the people, the communities and individuals called 'sectarian' and Staroobriadzi (Old-Believers), who, because of their faith, suffered persecution and discrimination under the old regime. They have received all the rights necessary for freedom of worship."

In an interview with the press 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 religious persecution. All religions now enjoy equal 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 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 religious organizations are equal before the law, they cannot become dependent upon any other organizations, and this is a reliable guarantee of the freedom they enjoy.

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

Under Soviet law, not only is every citizen free to profess any religion he chooses, but he has the right not to profess any faith and to conduct anti-religious propaganda if he desires, without fear of any restriction of his civic rights.

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

"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 guaranteed at the same time the right of every citizen to combat by argument, 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, baptize his children, enter into marriage in accordance with the traditions of his religion, and so forth. But these religious acts have no legal validity. They carry no restrictions on the rights of the citizen, but neither do they carry any 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, on the collective farms, in the schools or in the army. When a citizen is accepted for employment, when he enters a school or applies for membership in any public organization, no one has the right to ask him, and he is not obliged to give, any information about his religious beliefs. There are no statistics whatever in the country classifying citizens according to religion.

The laws of the Soviet Union prohibit any restriction of the rights of citizens, persecution for religious beliefs, or any offense against the religious feelings of the people. Any persons who try to interfere with the performance of religious services are punished under Soviet law.

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 attempt to force a particular faith upon them, and secured to every citizen of the USSR the 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 USSR, 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's decree of January 23, 1918, is recorded in Article 124 of the Fundamental Law of the Soviet Union, the Constitution of the USSR, which reads: "In order to ensure to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the USSR 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."

Reaction of Clergy and Laity to Decree on Separation of Church from State

THE decree separating the church from the state and the school from the church produced varying reactions among the clergy and laity of the different religions. It was received favorably by a considerable section of the clergy and laity, because it did away with the interference of the state authorities in the life of the religious organizations.

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

"The decree of the Soviet Government on freedom of conscience and 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 dominant church and has ceased to serve, in this respect, as an instrument in the hands of the 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 favoring the autocratic system which had given all sorts of privileges and advantages to the Russian Orthodox Church and the 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 and drew laymen into this struggle. Thus, under the cover of the religious issue, some

churchmen were actually conducting a political struggle for the restoration of the tsarist monarchy.

The reactionary section of the clergy used faithful laymen 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 counterrevolutionary elements in and outside the country as "persecution" of religion, religious persons and the church.

This calumny was refuted by representatives of the church. The volume, *The Truth About Religion in Russia*, edited by the



Patriarch Sergius,
Metropolitan of
Moscow and
Kolomna.

Metropolitan of Moscow, subsequently Patriarch Sergius, and published in 1942, contained the following statement:

"There were trials of churchmen in Russia in the years that followed the October Revolution. Why were these representatives of the church tried? Only because they used the cloth and the name of the church as a cover for conducting anti-Soviet activities. These were political trials which had nothing at all in common with the purely church life of the religious organizations and with the purely church work of individual clergymen."

The defeat of the foreign military intervention and of the domestic counterrevolution in the civil war, the success of socialist construction and the supreme loyalty of the people to the Soviet Government—all this inevitably exerted its influence upon the sentiments of the clergymen who had been vacillating. The wisest and most farsighted 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 support 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 of the domestic and foreign policies of the Soviet State.

On July 29, 1927, Metropolitan Sergius, at that time locum tenens of the Patriarchy, issued a declaration jointly 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 secular 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 stimulated the development and enhanced the activities of the religious organizations.

Religious Organizations in the Great Patriotic War against Fascism

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

The leaders of the many religions had strong evidence that only the Soviet Government was powerful enough to safeguard the freedom and state independence of the country. It was also obvious that only the Soviet Government was capable of saving the Russian Orthodox Church, which was itself 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 organizations for their own predatory ends. They used scouts and spies disguised as servants of the church, and attached icons and crucifixes to tanks and planes in order to persuade pious people not to open fire at 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 for enslaving the Soviet people.

The fascists hoped that they would have the support of the religious organizations and pious people in the USSR. But they grossly miscalculated. They were unable to conceal 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, along with its museums, archives and library, and carried off many valuable and unique church relics.

The invaders ruined the New Jerusalem Monastery at Istra,

a unique monument of church architecture built in the 17th century on the initiative of Patriarch Nikon.

The fascists ruined and plundered church memorials and treasures at Novgorod, Staritsa, Rzhev and many other cities.

During the war, all the religious organizations of the USSR gave their unqualified support and assistance to the Soviet Government in the struggle against the enemies of mankind. They conducted extensive patriotic activities. They issued appeals and messages to their congregations and collected funds for the production of tanks and planes, for presents to the men of the Soviet Army, and for relief to orphans, the sick, the wounded and the disabled.

On the very first day of the war, Metropolitan Sergius, then locum tenens of the Patriarchy, 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 behoove us, shepherds of the church,



Archbishop Makari signing the Stockholm Appeal.

to look on in silence at everything that is happening around us, not to encourage the fainthearted, not to console the sorrow-stricken, not to remind the hesitating of their duty and of the will of God . . . The Church of Christ gives its blessing to all Orthodox Christians who defend the sacred borders of our Motherland."

Metropolitan, now Patriarch, Alexius remained in beleaguered Leningrad throughout the blockade, which lasted for 900 days. He performed services and urged religious citizens to struggle against the enemy and to contribute for the needs of defense. Metropolitan Nikolai took an active part in the work of the State Extraordinary 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 and representatives of all other faiths did a great deal to promote the drive for funds and the collection of presents 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 the assistance rendered to the Soviet Army.

Since the end of the war, the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and of 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

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

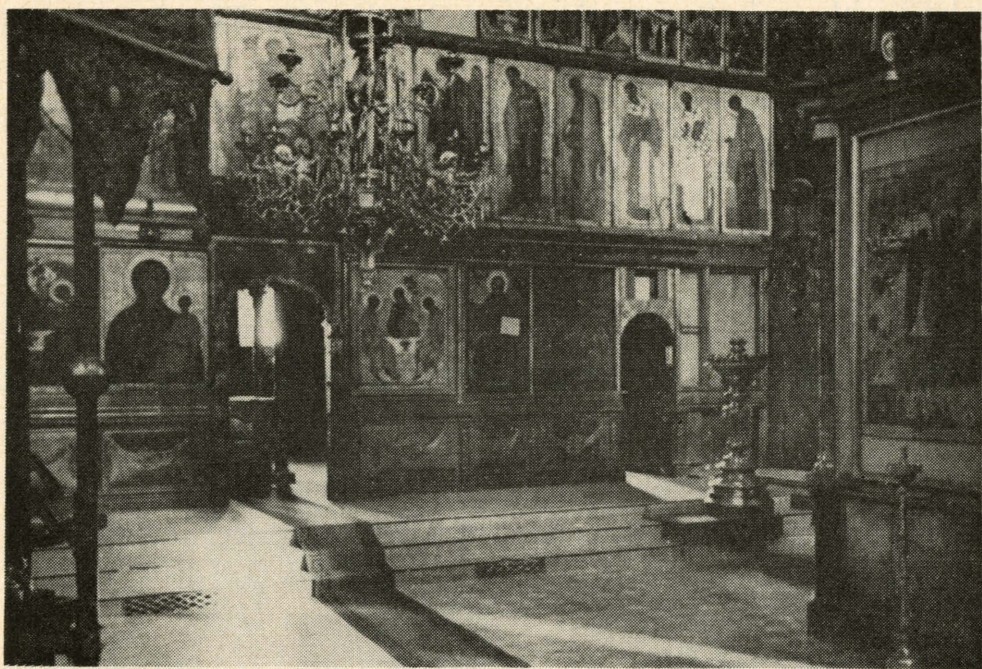
Services are openly and freely performed by the clergymen of all religions in Russian Orthodox and Catholic churches, in temples and mosques, in synagogues and prayer houses. Bells ring in all the churches where this is in accord with church traditions. In addition to organized services, clergymen visit the homes of religious citizens, on their invitation, to perform services or required rites.

The Russian Orthodox churches are free to administer baptism, to solemnize marriages and to conduct funeral services. Moslems are free to attend services in mosques, to observe the *Uraza* (monthly fast), the *Kurban* (sacrifice) and the *Nikah* (religious marriage). Jews have every opportunity to attend religious services at synagogues. Catholics and Lutherans enjoy full freedom to hold confirmations and other religious ceremonies. The same is true of all other religions.

On the Easter holidays, for instance, when, in accordance with the ancient traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church, believers bring Easter cakes to be blessed at church, many people may be seen 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, and so forth.

Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church publishes the monthly *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy*, Christian Orthodox calendars (wall and desk calendars), manuals for clergymen, textbooks for students of the seminaries and religious academies, the sermons of Metropolitan Nikolai, and so on.



The interior of Trinity Cathedral with icons painted by Rublev.

The Russian Orthodox Church in the Struggle for Peace is the title of a volume published in Russian, English, French and German. Magazines are also published by the Armenian Church and by the Evangelical Christian-Baptists. The state printshops print 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 organization of ecclesiastical schools by religious societies. The Russian Orthodox Church of the USSR, for example, maintains two ecclesiastical academies and eight seminaries in different cities.

Further evidence of the freedom of religion in the Soviet Union is afforded by the existence of several dozen monasteries and nunneries. Some of these, as, for example, the Troitse-Sergiev Abbey near Moscow, the Kiev-Pechersk Abbey, the Pochayev Abbey, and 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 them-

selves with agriculture and various handicrafts. The monasteries which have no land depend for their incomes on donations from their congregations. Thousands of pilgrims flock to these monasteries on the great holidays.

On July 18, 1951, holiday services at the Troitse-Sergiev Abbey were attended by representatives of the Christian Orthodox Churches in other countries who came to the USSR at the invitation of Patriarch Alexius: Alexander III, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East; Patriarch Justinian of Romania; Metropolitan Kiril of Bulgaria, and their attendants. The solemn services attracted large congregations.

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

In the report on its trip to the Soviet Union the Quaker delegation speaks favorably of 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. Citizens may receive religious training in the prayer houses where not only are services performed, but sermons and instruction are also given, or they may receive religious instruction in their own homes.

The procedure governing the organization and activities of the religious bodies is determined by laws based on the decree of January 23, 1918. Groups of 20 or more adult citizens may form religious societies in order to satisfy their religious interests.

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

Religious organizations have the right to lease, purchase or build premises for religious purposes. They may acquire means of transportation and set up enterprises for producing canonicals

Russian Orthodox Church's 500th Anniversary in 1948



An anniversary meeting in the Cathedral of the Resurrection.



Representatives of various countries attended the celebration.

and other necessities, as, for example, candle shops, icon painting shops, and the like.

Religious organizations are voluntary associations of religious persons; they depend entirely upon incomes derived from voluntary donations of their congregations, from the sale of candles, oil and other objects, and from the fees paid for the various services (baptism, marriages, prayers for the dead).

Relations between the state and the religious bodies are maintained through two government bodies: the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Council for the Affairs of the Religious Cults (for contact with religious societies other than the Russian Orthodox Church), which function under the auspices of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. These councils have authorized representatives in the different regions, territories and republics for maintaining contact between the Soviet authorities and the local religious bodies. They register the communities and arrange for the official transfer of prayer houses to the existing, as well as to the newly organized, religious communities.

These councils, which maintain contact between the Government and the religious societies, consider and settle all the problems raised by these societies. They draft legislation and decisions relating to the religious societies and see to it that the laws relating to the religious communities are properly observed. These councils do not interfere with the internal life of the religious societies nor with the canonical and dogmatic aspects of their activities.

The Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Council for the Affairs of the Religious Cults take the necessary steps to ensure that the citizens of the Soviet Union have the possibility of exercising the freedom of conscience guaranteed by the Constitution of the USSR.

It is in this way that the questions of freedom of religion and of relations between the state and the church have been settled in the Soviet Union.

Religious Organizations in the Soviet Union

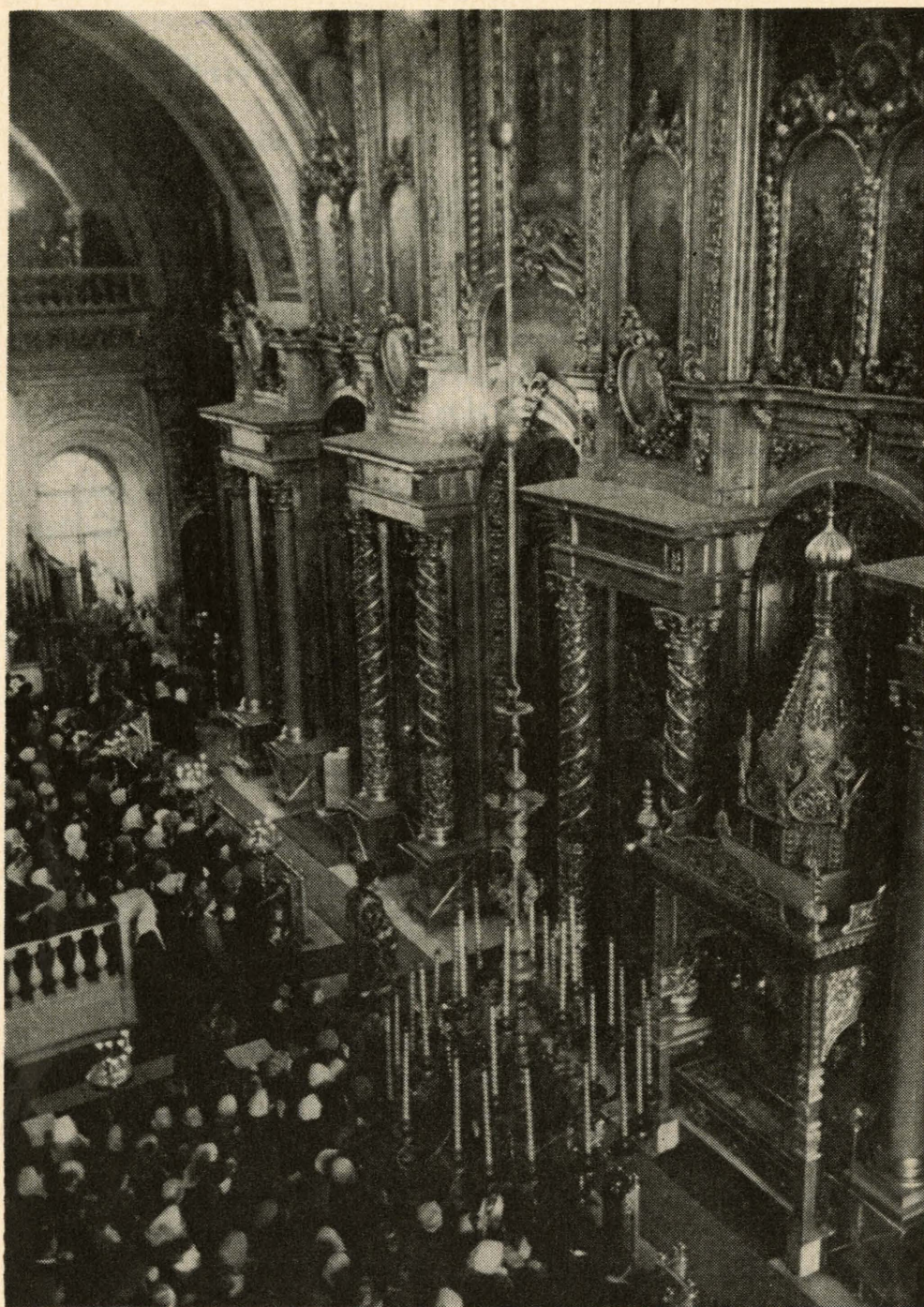
THE Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches, the largest religious bodies in the Soviet Union, have more than 20,000 functioning churches. The Moscow Patriarchy also has charge of a number of Russian Orthodox parishes located in the United States, China, France, Germany, Belgium and other countries. The 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. The Holy Synod also functions under the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. The Metropolitans of Krutitsy (Moscow), Leningrad and Kiev are permanent members of this synod.

In all the 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 administration in the central areas, as well as in the eparchies, or outlying districts. 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 in 1945, for the first time in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, its head, Patriarch Alexius, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem is also illustrative of the status of religion in the Soviet Union.

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



Easter services at the Russian Orthodox Yelokhovsky Cathedral.

tsarist Russia could not afford this opportunity to the head of the church. 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 most numerous following in the Soviet Union after the Russian Orthodox Church. The religious affairs of the Moslem communities are directed by the mullahs, who are directly responsible to the muhtasibs elected at conferences of the Moslem priesthood and laity as members of the religious boards.

The religious boards have the responsibility of opening new mosques where the need for them exists, and they appoint mullahs and muezzins. These boards also take charge of the training of priests in special schools (*madrasah*) and issue calendars and other religious publications.

There are four Moslem religious boards in the Soviet Union:



Moslem worshippers in a mosque.



Catholic believers attending services at St. Louis Church.

at Tashkent (Uzbek SSR), Ufa (Bashkir ASSR), Baku (Azerbaijan SSR) and Buinaksk (Daghestan ASSR).

The maintenance of four Moslem religious centers is made necessary by geographical and historical conditions and by the existence of different sects.

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

Echmiadzin, in the Caucasus, is the historic spiritual center of the most ancient Armenian Church. The head of the Armenian Church is the Supreme Catholicos-Patriarch of All the Armenians, who was elected in 1945 by the Council of the Armenian Church attended by dignitaries 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 Socialist Republic, is headed by an archbishop.

There are many Lutheran communities in the Latvian and Es-



Jewish services during Passover in a Moscow synagogue.

tonian Soviet Socialist Republics. These parishes are directed by their own episcopates.

The next largest groups in order are the Staroobriadzi, headed by the Archbishop of Moscow and All Russia, and the Evangelical Christian-Baptists, headed by an All-Union Council.

The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists maintains relations with similar organizations in foreign countries. 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, and to Buddhism, which is widespread in the Buryat-Mongolian Republic. The Buddhist Religious Board has its seat there.

In addition to these religious organizations, there are organizations with a smaller following in the Soviet Union, like the Seventh Day Adventists, Methodists, Molokane, and others. Regardless of the number of their followers, they all enjoy equality with other religious bodies.

Foreign Delegations on the Status of Religion in the Soviet Union

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 all had every opportunity to observe the life of the religious organizations in the Soviet Union. In verbal statements and in the press, the Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria, the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Archbishop of York and other outstanding hierarchs have 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



Patriarch George VI of Armenia at 2nd USSR Peace Conference.

interviewed leaders of religious organizations, ordinary priests and laymen. A British workers' delegation which visited the Soviet Union in May 1951 published a report in London in which it said the following of freedom of religion in the USSR:

"Religion is free and people practicing 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 conducted 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 the 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



Representatives of the clergy at the All-Union Peace Conference.

show me an authorized 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 his 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 wrote:

"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 St. Louis on two separate Sundays. As is usual, they found the same people there the second time that they had seen previously. These people explained that they had been going to church in Moscow all their lives, that they attended 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 the 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 USSR, which has proclaimed 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, close-knit, multinational family, which is free from the contradictions inherent in a class society and from religious feuds in particular.

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