

THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN RUSSIA TODAY¹

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AS I go through the notes I made on a recent trip to the U.S.S.R., three of these strike me as throwing a certain amount of light on the whole question of the information and impressions one gets in that country. In the first place, I had been told that the Moscow crowd was drably and poorly dressed; and certainly at first glance one does feel there is something odd about the Muscovite's appearance. One could easily be led to conclude that this was due to the poverty of his wardrobe. But in Leningrad, where people in fact dress in much the same way as at Moscow, the impression left is quite different. All this would remain most mysterious did one not remember that whereas in Leningrad we find a population that has always been urban, the Muscovite is fresh from the country. Between 1917 and 1958 the population of Moscow increased from 600,000 to more than six million, and the immense majority of the newcomers are peasants unfamiliar with town ways. Thus what gives us the feeling of strangeness about Moscow is really the unexpected rustic appearance of these new inhabitants.

Again, I had heard the fact that even V.I.Ps. sit in the front of their cars beside their chauffeurs put forward as an example of the real democratic feeling one finds in the Soviet. During my visit, however, I discovered that the seat next to the driver is considered to be the place of honour. Thus what had been taken for charmingly straightforward behaviour was, on the contrary, simply the rigid application of a protocol opposite to our own.

Then there is the instructive lesson to be drawn from those huge socialist-realist paintings one is constantly coming across. Often enough these simply reproduce the scene where they are hung. Thus, at the Universal Exhibition we find a huge canvas depicting a happy colourful throng of good-looking young men

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and women—all visiting the Exhibition. The office of the director of a sweet factory is reflected in the picture which adorns it, just as a painstaking reproduction of the University hangs over the Rector's head. In all these cases, of course, the image is just that little bit better than the original. For that is what socialist-realism means: facts are to be represented at the same time as they are and as they ought to be. No doubt the same principle underlies the information which is given out in Russia. We may well say that this is no longer truth as we understand it in the West. But neither, perhaps, is it propaganda. It is simply socialist-realism, which sees reality as projected within the wider terms of reference of a system and thus given a slightly different meaning from what our Western objective analysis would yield.

So much for the reservations one must have as regards what one picks up during a visit to Russia. It is with these in mind that I pass on my reflections on the state of religion in that country today. I have the impression that the Soviet leaders are faced with a phenomenon of the first importance in the rebirth of faith, at least among Christians and Jews. No doubt each instance of this very natural reaction has its own quite individual causes. Yet, in general, one can say that it arises from a profound sense of disillusionment with Marxism, which has been found to give rise to boredom and a sense of emptiness and of loss of vitality. The most interesting instances of this are to be found in the milieus apparently the best adapted to the régime and the most privileged under it. Thus the wife of a German university man who has lived in close contact with young Soviet intellectuals has recorded² how these, once they let themselves go in free discussions, would raise such problems as the origin of energy which only a creator, it would seem, could draw out of nothingness, and would criticize a materialism which only produced results in the realm of building but failed to give people the freedom they expected of it, concluding that they must render to the State the things that are the State's, but unto God the things that are God's, even if at this stage they did not wish to identify themselves with any definite confession, this being regarded as a reactionary step. At the opposite pole, I myself came across some less cerebral people who liked to follow the Orthodox liturgy, finding in its ceremonies and archaisms (the language, for example) something that evoked

² *Christ und Welt*, April 4, 1958.

the Russian past and so gave them that sense of continuity for which so many long.

It is essential to try and see this religious revival which these doubts and longings accompany or herald, against the background of the official U.S.S.R. of today. There it is figures, percentages, techniques and production that fill the attention. Politics as we understand them in the West have largely disappeared. Meet the President and Cabinet of any of the southern republics and you will find them speaking the same language as farm or factory managers. High officials have only one preoccupation: catching up with the Americans. That is why, probably in all sincerity, all want peace: without peace work in progress would stop. Peace abroad is the first consideration. But internal peace is essential too. One can well imagine that for the Soviet leaders a religious man is much less of a danger than a man with a mind for politics. A Trotskyite brings to life problems the State wishes to banish for ever, while a Christian is no problem at all: he fits easily into the framework of Orthodoxy with which one can easily come to terms. Rather than have them plotting against the State it is preferable that the Mohammedan, the Jew and the Christian should be free to go, after working hours, to their mosque, synagogue or church. So doing they will in no wise interfere with what seems to be the guiding-line of contemporary Soviet policy, catching up with the production norms and standard of living of the capitalist countries.

Such is the explanation of the liberal attitude at present adopted towards Christians, Jews³ and Mohammedans. Faced with a religious revival, the authorities have made up their minds to recognize it and grant freedom of worship. To their mind it is probably only a hangover from the old capitalist régime which will die out in time given a new social climate.

This present tactic is in full accord with Soviet legality, for liberty of worship is guaranteed by article 124 of the Constitution. This has been interpreted in a more generous sense since the Second World War when an appeal was made for a kind of national unity. A decree of November 1954 reaffirmed this principle, and on this occasion Mr Khrushchev denounced errors made in the conduct of the propaganda in favour of scientific

3 At least as regards their religion. There are, as we shall presently see, certain reservations to be made in the non-religious sphere.

atheism among the people. Let us note, however, that this atheistic propaganda (it too is inscribed in the Constitution) has not completely disappeared for all that. It has even been intensified among the intelligentsia—which proves that this sector of the population is not unaffected by it. But it has become less crude and is now chiefly concerned with showing that religion is unscientific. As late as 1957 a pamphlet attacking religious Judaism could appear. Nevertheless, the truth of the matter is that this propaganda 'doesn't sell'. It meets with almost complete indifference.

In fact, by feeling its way between the Marxist theory which remains its chief source of inspiration, and the needs of the hour which require flexible day-to-day tactics, the Soviet system goes on moving and developing. And if before my visit behind the Iron Curtain I had the idea that a very abnormal state of affairs existed outside the free world, I have come back with the conviction that gradually there has grown up a *modus vivendi* which is allowing the various religions to survive in Russia. The Catholic Church alone, due as much to its claims to universality as to the Russian national and religious traditions, is in a rather more difficult position.

First Glimpses of Christians in Russia

If in Moscow the Novodievitchy Monastery left me with a rather poor impression of the state of Russian Orthodoxy today, as soon as I left the city, all was changed. As I drove through the little villages on the Russian plain of a Sunday, I was surprised to see the population making its way to church for all the world just like our villagers in France. And I had the same feeling when I had a look at the little church in Moscow opposite the new University which is one of the thirty-eight open for worship in the city. The Orthodox priests who serve these churches do not seem unhappy. They can often be seen going about the town in cars. Not, however, on foot: wearing the soutane in the streets, even if permitted by the law, has never in fact been practised since the Revolution. I have been given to believe that the generosity of the faithful sometimes assures the priests more than 5,000 roubles a month, the equivalent of the salary of a university lecturer or of a Stakhanovite miner.

The monastery of Zagorsk, seventy kilometres from Moscow,

was founded nearly six hundred years ago by St Serge. It is one of the most important in the whole of the U.S.S.R., and the Patriarch Alexis, the head of the Russian Church, is its superior. Every day, even during the week, the six churches within its precincts are very busy, whilst on Sundays one finds quite a crowd, made up mostly of women, young and old, but also including plenty of children and men of all ages.⁴ The presence of these children is most significant, for it shows that many men even if they do not go to church themselves, nevertheless are willing that their children should receive religious instruction. The religious community of Zagorsk functions simultaneously as a monastery (one hundred monks), a parish (fifty priests serve the churches), a seminary (for Moscow; two hundred and fifty young priests are ordained there each year) and an academy (faculty) of theology; it is also an important intellectual centre. The Patriarch Alexis who often resides there is in correspondence with the leading thinkers of the Orthodox world.

If we of the West are sometimes a little disconcerted by the sight of Russian congregations at prayer (ecstatic looks, the sign of the Cross made over and over again at high speed, etc.) and by some of their customs (e.g., the sale of holy water), it would seem that the present religious revival is also to be seen at work in a big yield of vocations and especially in the new milieus where these arise. Traditionally, the priesthood in Russia descended from father to son, but this has now become rare. Real vocations nowadays often come from agnostic circles or working-class families. It is true that the secure comfort of a seminary professor (2,500 roubles a month) or the priest's stability of employment (he has a good salary, benefits from the State's social insurance scheme, and in old age gets a pension from the Patriarchate) could act as inducements. There is a big demand for priests. In each new village that is founded (e.g., in Siberia), a parish is established. The effect of war damage must also be taken into account. Thus all the churches in Stalingrad have just been rebuilt and need priests. All in all, the impression one gets at Zagorsk is that the religious movement is in full swing as much because faith is reviving as that the State no longer hampers the running of the Orthodox Church.

⁴ For both men and women the average of attendance is highest in the 18-30 age group. After 30 it falls, especially among men, but would seem to rise again among the over-fifties.

Nor are things different at Tiflis. There during the worst of the persecution only a few churches were able to remain open. Today, there are some eighteen dissident churches (thirteen of the Georgian Rite, three Russian and two Armenian), all well-attended, and this, as I was able to see for myself, even by young people. The same is true of the single Catholic church (of Latin rite) in that town. Sermons are preached there in Russian and sometimes in Greek, and one feels that the Russian influence is in the ascendant. The numerous icons would seem at least to point that way.

The Orthodox Church

In the well-appointed office of the Patriarchate in Moscow, the Metropolitan Nicholas, the most important figure after the Patriarch himself, gave me an overall picture of the state of the Orthodox Church. Its territory is divided into seventy-eight eparchies each ruled by a bishop appointed by the Patriarch alone without any government intervention. The Patriarch has a synod which advises him in important affairs; each bishop is assisted by a diocesan council; while on the parochial level the parish priest has his elected church council. Out of his church income each parish priest must send a part to the eparchy which in turn has to give a percentage to the Patriarch. The Patriarch has thus quite large sums at his disposal, and these he uses to finance the clergy pension fund and to support poor parishes at home and needy co-religionists abroad. According to the best figures, there are about thirty million faithful divided among 20,000 parishes and 35,000 priests. The religious life is followed in sixty-nine houses by some 5,000 monks or nuns (at Kiev alone there are three convents and 900 nuns). The rule of these religious houses makes work as well as prayer an obligation. Each monk must earn his own livelihood either on the monastic farm in the country or by craftsmanship in the town. Two Academies of Theology (Moscow-Zagorsk and Leningrad) with their four-year courses serve as a focus for the higher intellectual life of the Church, while there are eight seminaries for the education of young students for the priesthood. The seminarists spend four years in study, enjoying with other students the right of postponement of military service, and every year about forty young men are ordained from each seminary. In addition, the Leningrad

Seminary ordains five to six hundred young men who have done their studies by correspondence, and a similar scheme at Moscow provides a hundred new priests yearly. This force of more than a thousand priests a year suffices, it would seem, for the needs of public worship. There has been, too, a steady increase over the years. At Leningrad there were seventy-four enrolled students in 1946, 172 in 1950, 320 in 1952, and 396 in 1953.

Relations between Church and State are taken care of by a special government department. Total separation is the general principle at work, churches, seminaries and convents being put at the disposal of the hierarchy for the needs of public worship, while the upkeep of personnel and buildings is entirely the responsibility of the Church.

Within the limits imposed by severe paper-rationing, the Patriarch is free to publish what he pleases and has his own press. In 1956 this brought out a Bible. Despite the fact that no religious publication can be sold outside churches, seminaries or convents, the printing of 55,000 copies was exhausted and a new edition is now in preparation. The *Journal* of the Patriarchate has appeared monthly since 1943 (I was given a specimen copy and noticed a picture of Mr Khrushchev on the second page of the cover). Recently a collection of the acts, letters and sermons of the Patriarch Alexis and the Metropolitan Nicholas has come out, as well as some rare liturgical books, but so far no work of theology, exegesis or spirituality. It would appear that the theological revival concentrates on the study of the Fathers.

I asked Metropolitan Nicholas how a belief in the spiritual could adapt itself to Marxist surroundings or how there could be harmony between the Church and a State which will only hear of historical materialism. He replied that a distinction must be made, within Marxism, between the materialism to which the Church remains fundamentally opposed and the socialism which presents no difficulty to the Christian conscience. Besides, he added, while it was Peter the Great who suppressed the Patriarchate, leaving the Russian Church for two centuries with only a metropolitan at its head, it was the Revolution of February 1917 which led to its restoration. Moreover the situation had improved (in theory if not in fact) since 1927 when the existence of the Orthodox hierarchy was recognized in law.

Metropolitan Nicholas considers that the figures we have just

given are significant when it is remembered that it needs a congregation of 2,000 to keep a church going. For this would mean that, by and large, church attendance has by now returned to within fifty per cent of the 1915 figures. How does the Metropolitan explain this veritable resurrection, a resurrection that has taken place in what are still very difficult circumstances, seeing that religious instruction cannot be given to children except by the priest visiting the home? We must thank the grandmothers, his reply would be, for it was they who maintained the tradition of religion in the worst days of the persecution. And it is still above all the 'poor', the simple folk, who are being converted, not so much the students as the young workers and peasants; rarely, it must be admitted, members of the Party.

Coming now to relations with the Russian Orthodox outside the U.S.S.R., the Metropolitan affirmed that nearly all of these come under Moscow, only those in North and South America remaining apart. Relations between Constantinople and Moscow, the two great capitals of Orthodoxy, seem quite good and there is some talk now of the convocation of a Pan-Orthodox Council. The Russian Church refused in 1948 to take part in the Ecumenical Council at Amsterdam, but since then Metropolitan Nicholas has visited Utrecht and it seems as if this first official contact should have quite positive results.

What are to be our conclusions on Orthodoxy in the U.S.S.R. today, remembering that its activities form the lion's share of the religious movement in that country? Certainly the temporal power does not oppose it even if the official atheistic propaganda goes on as we have seen. But can we not go further? Is not the Government seeking to make use of the vast machinery which the Russian Orthodox Church as now reconstituted represents? Among many other things the behaviour of the official who accompanied me during my visit to the Patriarchate tends to make me think so. This fine diplomat, Marxist and atheist though he was, showed such marked respect towards the Metropolitan that one couldn't but be surprised. This was scarcely the attitude a triumphant power adopts towards a beaten rival whose continued existence is tolerated. It was rather the kind of behaviour one sees between partners who have come to a mutually advantageous understanding which they desire to keep going.

I remained sceptical when the Metropolitan stated that since

1917 there had been no further proselytism between rival churches, for I could not but remember that as late as 1945 the Uniate churches in the Ukraine, in Poland and Rumania had been forcibly removed from their allegiance to Rome and placed under the authority of the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow. I remembered too how I had been told at Tiflis that the Greek Melchite had been the only church there which had not been allowed to re-open for worship. All this reveals the governmental support given to Orthodoxy at the expense of Catholics, especially those of oriental rites, as well as of any form of Orthodoxy subject to Constantinople. Besides, I had myself had occasion when in Israel to observe how the Russian monasteries in that country, especially those in Galilee, were used as channels of infiltration.

The authorities indeed have probably made up their minds to make full use of this revival of institutional religion. Hence the role assigned to the Russian Church in Central Europe and the Middle East, and even among the Orthodox in Ethiopia and Egypt. The Moscow Patriarchate, for example, denounced the Suez landings. What we are witnessing in the U.S.S.R. is in fact an unhappy compromise of a very complex nature which, while contributing greatly to the renaissance of Christianity in the country, also favours certain Soviet aims in the world at large. But for all that it must never be forgotten that the Russian Church has kept itself in being with exemplary courage in the most dramatic circumstances, and that it has always struggled to save the faith in Slav lands.

Other Christian Bodies

The Old Believers. Breaking off from Orthodoxy in the seventeenth century, mainly for liturgical reasons, and remaining for a long period without bishops, the Old Believers, as they call themselves, now number some 850,000 faithful under twelve bishops. There are about 50,000 of them in Moscow alone. The community has been recognized by the State, enjoys the same privileges as the Orthodox Church, and has its headquarters in a Patriarchate (or Archbishopric) in Moscow. Like the Orthodox they have now grown once again to nearly fifty per cent of their pre-revolution strength. One hears that conversations are taking place between Orthodox and Old Believers with a view to reunion.

Baptists. A special importance attaches to the Baptists in Russia. As is understandable they have a special link with the Anglo-Saxon world. This, however, so far from being a disadvantage, has actually led to their being treated benevolently by the Government: they represent a card that could be played in the Cold War. Numbering about 500,000 and growing rapidly (30,000 new members a year according to their own figures), they are divided up into small communities with practically no central organization, and are particularly strong in the Ukraine.

It is among the Baptists that one finds the greatest proportion of young people. Their comparative lack of organization suits the Russian temperament, whilst, for their part, they say that Russia more than any other country is a most fruitful field for the spread of the Baptist message. One very significant thing is to be noted: as a quite special measure, they are permitted to send their candidates for the ministry abroad to complete their studies. At the moment, there are six of these in London.

The Catholic Church. In Russia itself, the Catholic community of Latin rite has always been drawn from foreign minorities. It is not a truly native element. On the other hand, in Latvia, Lithuania and the Polish Ukraine it represents the last outpost of the West and is deeply rooted there. Since the Baltic countries are difficult of access, there is little information to be had about the position of Catholics there. But at Moscow's Catholic Church information about the Church's position in the U.S.S.R. as a whole is readily given. There are 1,250 parishes in the Soviet Union, 600 of these being in Lithuania, three in Latvia, most of the remainder in the Polish Ukraine. Altogether there are eight bishops: five in Lithuania and three in Latvia. The parishes in other parts come under these Lithuanian and Latvian bishops, the church at Moscow, for example, being subject to the Bishop of Riga. There are two seminaries, one at Riga with thirty students, the other at Kaunas with seventy.

At Moscow itself, the Catholic parish is about 2,000 strong, the majority (eighty per cent) being of Polish origin. The young are poorly represented, forming only about ten per cent of the whole. The community, however, seems well-to-do, and about sixty members of Moscow's diplomatic corps attend the church. The parish priest is a Pole and would seem to be in good circumstances,

but little is known about the real condition of other Catholics.

The Jews

From what I was able to pick up in the U.S.S.R. I gathered that the Jewish religion is, surprisingly enough, very much alive. In Moscow alone where the Jewish population is between 400,000 and 500,000 (the other great centres are Leningrad with 300,000 Jews, few of whom practise their religion however, and Kiev with 200,000) there are three large synagogues and about fifty small ones. One of the large ones which I visited was full every evening and at the hour of prayer. On a quite ordinary day I saw there more than 200 men, most of them young. Stranger though I was, I found myself welcomed there without any reservation, and the replies to my questions came quite spontaneously even through the medium of an interpreter. I had the same kind of welcome in the little synagogue at Tiflis where there are some 40,000 Jews (there are only 10,000 Jews in the rest of Georgia, among these several thousand in a Jewish *kolkhoz* 300 kilometres to the north of Tiflis). I was surrounded by a crowd of young people who thronged me with questions: 'Do the Jews in France practise their religion?' 'What about the Christians?', etc. They told me that the Jewish community in Tiflis is one of the oldest in the world, and that they have no desire to move to Birobidjan (a Jewish state created by the Soviets on the border of Manchuria where there are now, after several false starts and periods of repression, about 40,000 Jews—one per cent of the total Soviet Jew population). They prefer to work in the nationalized stores and at the traditional crafts of Tiflis. When, however, I mentioned that only two months previously I had been in Israel and at Jerusalem, a respectful silence fell upon the group. They looked at me with envy in their eyes. And since nobody dared to ask me any more questions, I did not dare to ask any more myself.

This phenomenon of silence is in my opinion extremely important, and I came across it in every synagogue I visited. In general the synagogues are kept in very good repair and at Tiflis extensive alterations are taking place, which would suggest some degree of security and wealth. This indeed is not astonishing for I was told that on the great feast days (Rosh Hashana, for instance) all the synagogues in the capital and in the provinces

alike are packed, with the worshippers overflowing into the streets. At the last Rosh Hashana there were 10,000 present in one of the big Moscow synagogues alone.

At the headquarters of the Chief Rabbi of Moscow (he is also Chief Rabbi of the whole of the Soviet Union) information is freely given on the state of religion among the Jews of Russia. But if it is known that there are three million Jews in the U.S.S.R., it is impossible to give a figure for those who practise their religion. It is likely, however, that the figure is a high one, as we have just seen. *Vis-à-vis* the State Judaism enjoys the same status as Orthodoxy and all the other officially recognized religious communities as regards allotment and upkeep of places of worship, and the Chief Rabbi negotiates with the Council for Public Worship about these matters. At Moscow there is a college for the education of future rabbis, and these are in sufficient number to meet the needs of the whole country. I was shown the prayer-book (the latest edition came out in 1956) and the newspapers which the Jewish communities publish.

Does the Chief Rabbi have any complaints? None at all. Everything is going smoothly. Vocations are plentiful. There have even been eighty *shochetim* ('sacrificers'—for the provision of kosher meat) trained in the last two years. He has only two regrets: circumcision, forbidden in Stalin's time, is still little practised; and, it is felt, the crowds on feast days would be even greater than they are, were the Jewish workers allowed special holidays. This, however, has been systematically refused.

But the real Jewish problem in the U.S.S.R.—and it is recognized that there *is* one—has little to do with the question of religion as such. As we have seen, the Jews have considerable freedom of worship. The difficulty rests rather in the existence of a Jewish national feeling which could all too easily open the door to Zionism. It would rather seem that freedom of the press is limited to the case of religious publications in Hebrew, whilst everything to do with Jewish culture, especially in its Yiddish form, is to all intents and purposes forbidden. There have been numerous promises of an improvement in this matter. Yet today there is only one Yiddish paper published, the *Birobidjaner Shtern* which appears three times a week in Birobidjan. Recently some Yiddish books have been translated into Russian; more recently still three concerts of Yiddish folk music have been given. But

all this amounts to very little. Here, perhaps, we have at least a partial explanation of the throngs of young people in the synagogues. The outlets which Sionism and the traditional culture of their forefathers could give them being denied, yet still endowed with the deep community-sense of their race, these young people resort to the only place left where they can meet their fellow-Jews: the synagogue. It seems to me significant that in the synagogues I kept hearing time and time again of Birobidjan (purely lay development though that be), whilst in Moscow I was told that quite a large number of young folk had moved to that region. This took place at a time when the State was increasing its propaganda in favour of such emigration, in an effort to find an answer to that deep national feeling of the Jew which remains unshaken in the face of all opposition.

Islam

When I told Mr Zhukov, the deputy Minister for Cultural Affairs at Moscow, that I intended my survey of religion in the U.S.S.R. to include Mohammedanism, he remarked that in that case I must not miss visiting the Muslim republics in the south. Before setting out for these, I had the opportunity of visiting the mosque at Leningrad which had been built in pre-revolutionary times for the ten thousand Tartars to be found in that area, and which is open to the public. Then I flew straight from Leningrad to the shores of the Black Sea and reached the autonomous republic of Abkhazia. This is a dependency of the federal republic of Georgia, and its population of some three hundred thousand is half Muslim, half Greek Orthodox. On next to Georgia itself, where there is a small minority of about twenty thousand Muslims, of whom about half live in Tbilisi, the ancient Tiflis. This town has a mosque which is functioning as has Batumi about two hundred kilometres away. What I witnessed in the mosque at Tiflis is typical of many such visits, all made at the evening hour of prayer. In the part set aside for women there were about fifteen worshippers, all of them unveiled, and a large number of children. There were hardly ever any men. In Georgia, and, as I later discovered, in Azerbaidjan too, the mosques are shared turn and turn about by the Sunnites, the major and orthodox Muslim grouping, and by the Shiites, who, though forming only about ten per cent of the Muslim world as a whole, are very numerous

in this region owing to its proximity to Iran. This surprising arrangement has been in force since the Revolution. The Georgian Muslims work mainly in factories, although many of them are taxi-drivers. They rarely engage in agriculture.

In contrast with Georgia, nearly all the population of Azerbaidjan is Muslim. In the capital city of Baku I visited the fine mosque and subsequently had a long conversation with the leaders of the two communities, the Sheik El Islam of the Shiites, and the Sunnite Grand Mufti, a conversation rendered somewhat difficult by reason of the double interpretation involved, there being nobody at hand sufficiently proficient in both French and Azerbaidjani. Seemingly in order to maintain a strict equality between their two sects, the spokesmen would both reply in turn to the same question. They began by affirming their satisfaction with the separation between religion and the State resulting from the revolution which granted Muslims autonomy in their confessional affairs and freedom of worship. Mosques and seminaries belong to the State, but are put at the disposal of the Muslim authorities who are responsible for the expenses of maintenance and worship. The latter is well attended (I could not, however, no matter how often I asked, get any figures), and vocations are sufficiently numerous to keep the mosque services going, even in Georgia. The spokesmen admitted, however, that those who attend the mosques—and these are equally divided between the two sects—belong to the older age-groups, while the younger generation tends to stay away. The system of sharing out the mosques works out quite well, and equally applies to the two seminaries at Tashkent and Bokhara (where there is also a large theological academy). In these seminaries the students are taught the four principal points of difference between the two sects, and every year some one hundred and ten complete their studies, many of these going on to the great Islamic faculty of El Azar in Cairo. It is at Bokhara and Tashkent too that the principal religious publications are produced, such as calendars, editions of the Koran and a monthly review. There is quite a flourishing intellectual life in these two centres.

The administration of Islam in Azerbaidjan, Georgia and Armenia is in the hands of a committee elected each year in the course of a congress. This board consists of nine muftis (five Shiite and four Sunnite), two for Georgia, two for Armenia, one

for Kirovabad and four for Baku. One of these last is elected Sheik El Islam, but he must be a Shiite since at Baku the majority belong to that sect. The vice-president is a Sunnite. A seminary is shortly to be built at Baku itself, but meantime Azerbaidjan alone sends some ten to fifteen young men a year to study at Bokhara or Tashkent.

This, however, is only a small part of the total Muslim strength of the U.S.S.R. That, in fact, amounts to some forty million, concentrated mainly in central Asia and the Caucasus, and this makes the Soviet the third largest Muslim power in the world, after Pakistan and Indonesia. There are, indeed, three other centres quite independent of the Sheik El Islam. These are: Ufa where a mufti is in charge of all the Muslims in the European parts of Russia and Siberia; Makhach Kala, for Daghestan and the northern Caucasus; Tashkent, for the thirty million Muslims of central Asia. Tashkent is, in fact, the true geographical centre of Soviet Mohammedanism. Faith there remains very much alive and the population is traditionalist. Even agnostics, for instance, refrain from eating pork, while Samarkand is still a constant centre of pilgrimage. And from Tashkent emissaries visit the five federal Muslim republics of central Asia: Uzbekistan with six million three hundred thousand inhabitants, Turkmenistan with one million three hundred thousand, Kazakhstan with six million five hundred thousand, Tadjikistan with one million five hundred thousand and Kirghizia with one million five hundred thousand.

From this general survey of Islam in the U.S.S.R. it emerges that it enjoys quite a considerable measure of freedom of worship. It can even be said that the very structures of Islam are maintained by the State. Certainly the autonomy enjoyed by a republic like Abkhazia provides the Muslims of the area with a familiar enough background and setting. Abkhazia and Azerbaidjan, both of which have a full apparatus of government (the latter even has a Minister for Foreign Affairs), constitute real Muslim states. In Azerbaidjan even, the non-Muslim minority of about three hundred thousand is administrated in a special way in the autonomous territory of Karaba where seventy-five per cent of the population are Armenian Catholics.

It is probable that Soviet diplomacy benefits from this situation. The some sixty pilgrims (nearly always high dignitaries) who are

allowed each year to go to Mecca, serve as a useful testimony to Soviet penetration in the Middle East, while the well-appointed and excellently directed academy of theology at Bokhara is a show-piece which Muslims from abroad are invited to see. Far from burning bridges as it is often accused of doing, the Soviet permits these contacts and even initiates them. Azerbaijan exports petrol and rubber to Muslim countries and has entered into special economic and cultural agreements with Iran.

Despite all this, however, a deep and constant effort of 'Russification' goes on. The transformation of society and material progress (modern methods have increased oil production from two million tons in 1920 to seventeen million today) have been a severe blow to Islam, which has been hard put to it to survive in this changing milieu. The Russian language has penetrated everywhere, and, of course, in the last resort, orders are constantly coming from Moscow. We have the admission of the religious authorities themselves to the loss of faith among the younger generation. How could it be otherwise with a religion with which the social customs of everyday life are so thoroughly mingled when, for example, the use of the veil and polygamy have been suppressed? At Baku I attended a dancing exhibition given by some local girls of between ten and fifteen. After some regional items had been given, a part of the programme was devoted to dances *à la Moscow* which the children had been taught. It is difficult to imagine little girls subjected to such a training and influence growing up later into good Mohammedan wives.

With these reflections I must close. What is true for Islam is true for other religions as well. The Soviet system as a whole, under the influence of Marxism, continues to exercise pressure on every form of religious belief in the name of historical materialism. But the Marxist dialectic is supple. In the hands of extremely skilful statesmen it marks out for itself certain objectives and to these everything else is sacrificed. The immediate objectives at present are production, investment and a rise in the standard of living. With this in view a certain degree of thaw is necessary at home as well as abroad, and in this respect a Christian is easier to deal with than a Trotskyite. How long this tactic will continue to be considered a useful one is an important question for us all. For my part I think it will last a long time. But in the last resort, what

is even more significant than this tactical liberalism adopted by the Soviet Government as regards religion is the failure of every renewed effort of the anti-religious propaganda. There one sees what the people of the U.S.S.R. really think.