Methods for Antireligious Propaganda Among the Muslims*

The question of the methods of antireligious propaganda among the Muslims is a very complicated and delicate one. It is complicated on one hand by the position which Islam occupies in the lives of the Muslim peoples, and on the other hand by the social and political conditions of the Muslim peoples in general.

The question of the necessity of antireligious propaganda among the Muslims, not only in Russia but far beyond Russia's borders, arouses, of course, no disputes or disagreements among us, the Communists. For us, all religions are alike..... What concerns us is choosing the methods of which to carry through this task painlessly and successfully .......

We must acknowledge that there are a number of reasons for adopting methods absolutely different from those used among other peoples. .... Among the "great" religions of the world, Islam is of comparatively recent origin, and therefore it possesses particular strength and vigor.... In addition it provides - more than any other faith - rules of political and civil behavior, and in that way it differs from other religions, in which spiritual and ethical motives predominate. Shariat, or the Muslim law, represents a code of laws and legal norms which regulate the entire life of a Muslim. ....

The second important fact which complicates antireligious propaganda is the social and economic position of the Muslim dealt people during recent centuries. The defeat to the Arab culture on one hand, and to the Turko-Tatar culture on the other (the expulsion of Arabs from Spain and the Turko-Tatars from southeastern Europe, the conquest by the Europeans of North African and Near Eastern Muslim possessions, and the subjugation by the Russians of the Tatars, the Bashkirs, the Mountaineers of the Caucasus, and the Turkic peoples of Central Asia) resulted in the political, social, and economic enslavement of almost the entire Muslim world of 300 million people.

The above fact was bound to have a repercussion on the Muslim people's faith. The first encroachments of Western European imperialism on the Muslim countries took the form of Crusades, but in recent years the struggle has become purely economic. Nevertheless, in the view of the Muslims, or at least of the majority of them, this struggle is still interpreted as a political struggle, i.e., the struggle against Islam as a whole. Such an attitude can be easily explained because, according to the Muslims, the entire Muslim world, without distinction of nationality and tribe, represents one undivided whole.

Consequently, Islam is even today, in the eyes of the Muslim peoples, a religion which is oppressed and which must be defended. (Hence the difficulty of antireligious propaganda among the Muslims.)
Speaking of obstacles to antireligious propaganda among the Muslims, we must also mention that these peoples are very backward. . . .

What, then, are the methods that should be used?

First, a very careful and dextrous approach . . . . Our program should be of the nature of antireligious propaganda, and not of antireligious struggle. We must knock from the hands of our enemies the weapon they use against us: we must openly say to those concerned that we do not conduct any struggle against any religions but only propagandize our own atheistic views - which we have an absolute right to do.

Second, we must clearly indicate that we have no connections whatsoever with the former missionary groups, and we must have only Communists of Muslim origin to carry on antireligious propaganda. . . .

Third, we must conduct effective propaganda, and make our own conduct an example of it. . . . It is necessary for every Muslim to get well acquainted with an atheist and to form a good opinion of him. (It is desirable to carry on discussions on religious subjects among the Muslim workers in towns and in factories, and gradually pass the information on to the villages.)

But when we conduct antireligious propaganda among the Muslims, we must not forget for a moment that their cultural backwardness and their position as a politically and morally downtrodden people are their main evil. . . . Even since the formation of the autonomous republics, the Muslims have very often stayed away from
participation in the political life of their republics. As long as we do not break these chains (of political backwardness), as long as we do not make these peoples truly free and equal citizens of the Soviet republic, no antireligious propaganda can be successful. The improvement in the education of the Muslim peoples; the extensive drawing of these peoples into economic and administrative, and also political, organs of the government, whenever that is possible; the widening of party work among them - these are the tasks of the day in the work among the Muslim people...
APPENDIX - II

IMPORTANT LEGISLATIONS AND DIRECTIVES ON RELIGION (1917 - 1938)

I. Decree on the Separation of Church from State and School from Church of January 23, 1918

1. The Church is separate from the State.

2. It is prohibited to enact on the territory of the Republic local laws or regulations which

would put any restraint upon, or limit freedom of conscience or establish any advantages or privileges on the grounds of the religion of citizens.

3. Each citizen may confess any religion or no religion at all. Loss of any rights as the result of the confession of a religion or the absence of a religion shall be revoked.

The mention in official papers of the religion of a citizen is not allowed.

4. The actions of the Government or other organizations of public law may not be accompanied by any religious rites or ceremonies.

5. The free performance of religious rites shall be granted so long as it does not disturb the public order and infringe upon the rights of the citizens of the Soviet Republic. In such cases, the local agencies are entitled to take the necessary measures to secure public order and safety.

6. No person may evade his citizen's duties on the grounds of his religion. Exceptions to this provision, and only under the condition that a certain duty of a citizen shall be substituted by another, may be permitted by the decision of the people's courts.
7. Religious oaths shall be abolished. In cases where it is necessary only a solemn vow may be given.

8. The acts of civil status shall be kept solely by civil (status) agencies.

9. The school shall be separate from the Church. The teaching of religion is prohibited in all state, municipal or private educational institutions where a general education is given. Citizens may give and receive religious instructions privately.

10. All ecclesiastical and religious associations are subject to regulations pertaining to private societies and unions, and shall not enjoy any advantages or receive any subsidies either from the State or from local self-governing institutions.

11. The compulsory exaction of fees or impositions to benefit ecclesiastical and religious associations as well as any kind of coercion or infliction of punishment by these associations upon their members is prohibited.

12. No ecclesiastical or religious associations shall have the right to own property. Such associations shall not enjoy the rights of a legal entity.

13. All property belonging to churches and religious associations existing in Russia shall become public property.
Buildings and objects intended especially for religious worship shall be handed over by special decision of local or central authorities, free of charge, for use by the religious associations concerned.

II. Law on Religious Associations of April 8, 1929
(as amended January 1, 1932)*

1. Churches, religious groups, sects, religious movements, and other associations for any cult or any denomination come under the Decree of January 23, 1918, on the separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church (Collection of Laws No.18, 1918, text No.203).

2. Religious associations of believers of all denominations shall be registered as religious societies or groups of believers.

   A citizen may be a member of only one religious association (society or group).

3. A religious society is a local association of not less than 20 believers who are 18 years of age or over and belong to the same cult, faith or sect, united for the common satisfaction of their religious needs. Believers who are not numerous enough to organize a religious society may form a group of believers.

   Religious societies and groups do not enjoy the rights of a legal entity.

* Originally published in Sobranie uzakoneny i rasporiagsheny, no.35 (1929), text no. 353; amendments from ibid.,no.8 (1932), text no.41 II, 6.
4. A religious society or group of believers may start its activities only after the registration of the society or group by the committee for religious matters at the proper city or district (raion) soviet.

5. In order to register a religious society at least 20 initiators must submit to the agencies mentioned in the previous Article an application in accordance with the form determined by the Permanent Committee for Religious Matters at the (Council of Ministers).

6. In order to register a group of believers, the representatives of the group (Art. 13) must submit an application to the agencies mentioned in Article 4 of the city or district where the group is located in accordance with the form determined by the Permanent Committee for Religious Matters at the (Council of Ministers).

7. The registration agencies shall register the society or group within one month, or inform the initiators of the denial of the registration.

8. The registration agencies shall be informed on the composition of the society, as well as on their executive and accounting bodies and on the clergy, within the period and in accordance with the forms determined by the Permanent Committee for Religious Matters at the (Council for Ministers).
9. In the list of members of religious societies or groups of believers only believers who expressed consent thereto may be included.

10. For the satisfaction of their religious needs, the believers who have formed a religious society may receive from the district or city soviet, under a contract, free of charge, special prayer buildings and objects intended exclusively for the cult. Besides that, the believers who have formed a religious society or group of believers may use for prayer meetings other premises left to them by private persons or local soviets on lease. Such premises shall be subject to all regulations provided for in the present Law relating to prayer buildings; the contracts for the use of such premises shall be concluded by individual believers on their personal responsibility. Such premises shall be subject to technical and sanitary regulations.

A religious society or group of believers may use only one prayer building or (complex of) premises.

11. Transactions for the management and use of religious property, such as hiring of watchmen, buying of fuel, repairing of the building and objects destined for the rite, purchasing of products or property necessary
for a religious rite or ceremony, and other transactions closely and directly connected with doctrine and ritual of the cult, as well as for the renting of premises for prayer meetings, may be made by individual citizens who are members of the executive body of religious societies or are representatives of groups of believers.

No contract embodying such arrangements may contain in its text any reference to commercial or industrial transactions, even if these acts are of a kind directly connected with the affairs of the cult, such as the renting of a candle factory or a printing establishment for the printing of religious books, etc.

12. For each general assembly of a religious society or group of believers, permission shall be obtained: in cities from committees for religious matters of the city soviets, and in rural areas from the executive committees of the district.

13. For the accomplishment of functions connected with the management and use of the religious property (Art. 11) and for outside representation, the religious associations elect at their general assemblies executive bodies from among their members by open ballot—a religious society, an executive body of three members, and a group of believers with one representative.
14. The registration agencies are entitled to remove individual members from the executive body of a religious society or the representative elected by a group of believers.

15. The general assembly may elect an auditing committee of no more than three members for the examination of religious property and money collected by religious associations from their members as donations or voluntary offerings.

16. No permission of the government authorities is necessary for the meetings of the executive and auditing organs.

17. Religious associations may not: (a) create mutual credit societies, cooperative or commercial undertakings, or in general, use property at their disposal for other than religious purposes; (b) give material help to their members; (c) organize for children, young people, and women special prayer or other meetings, circles, groups, departments for Biblical or literary study, sewing, working or the teaching of religion, etc., excursions, children's playgrounds, libraries, reading rooms, sanatoria, or medical care.

Only books necessary for the purpose of the cult may be kept in the prayer buildings and premises.
18. Teaching of any kind of the religious cult in schools, boarding schools, or preschools establishments maintained by the State, public institutions or private persons is prohibited. Such teaching may be given exclusively in religious courses created by the citizens of the USSR with the special permission of the Permanent Committee for Religious Matters at the (Council of Ministers).

19. The activities of the clergymen, preachers, preceptors and the like shall be restricted to the area in which the members of the religious association reside and in the area where the prayer building or premises are situated.

The activities of clergymen, preachers and preceptors who permanently serve two or more religious associations shall be restricted to the area of residence of the believers who are members of such religious associations.

20. The religious societies and groups of believers may organize local, All-Russian or All-Union religious conventions or conferences by special permission issued separately for each case by a. the Permanent Committee for Religious Matters at the (Council of Ministers) if an All-Russian or All-Union convention or congress on the territory of the RSFSR is supposed to be convoked;
b. the local Committee for Religious Matters, if a local convention is supposed to be convoked. The permission for convocation of republican conventions and conferences shall be granted by the Committee for Religious Matters of the appropriate republic.

21. Local, all-Russian and All-Union religious conventions and conferences may elect from among their members executive bodies in implementation of the decisions of the convention or conference. The list of members of the elected executive bodies shall be submitted simultaneously with the materials of the convention or conference of the authority which granted the permission for organizing the convention or conference in two copies in accordance with the form determined by the Permanent Committee for Religious Matters at the (Council of Ministers).

22. Religious congress (and conventions) and executive bodies elected by them do not possess the rights of a legal entity and, in addition, may not:

a. form any kind of central fund for the collection of voluntary gifts form believers;

b. make any kind of obligatory collection;

c. own religious property, receive the same by contract, obtain the same by purchase, or hire premises for religious meetings;

d. conclude any kind of contracts or legal transactions.
23. The executive bodies of religious societies or groups, as well as religious conferences (and conventions), may use exclusively in religious matters stamps, seals and stationery with the imprint of their names. Such stamps, seals and stationery may not include emblems or slogans established for Soviet agencies.

24. Religious conventions and conferences may be initiated and convoked by religious societies and groups of believers, their executive bodies and executive bodies of religious conferences (for conventions).

25. Objects necessary for the rites of the cult, whether handed over under contract to the believers forming the religious association, acquired by by them, or donated to them for the purpose of the cult, are nationalized and shall be under the control of the Committee for Religious Matters at the city or district soviet.

26. Premises used for the dwelling of a watchman which are located near the prayer building shall be leased together with other religious property to believers by contract, free of charge.

27. Prayer buildings with objects shall be leased to believers forming religious associations for use by the Committee for Religious Matters at the city or district soviet.

28. Prayer buildings with objects in these buildings shall be received by contract from the representatives of the district or city soviet by no less than 20 members of a religious society for use by all believers.
29. In the contract concluded between believers and the city or district soviet (it) shall be required that the persons who receive a prayer building and religious objects for use (Art. 28) shall:

a. keep and take care of it as state property entrusted to them;

b. repair the prayer building, as well as pay expenses connected with the possession and use of the building, such as heating, insurance, guarding, taxes, (state and) local, etc.;

c. use the property exclusively for the satisfaction of religious needs;

d. compensate for any damage caused to the State by deterioration or defects of the property;

e. keep an inventory of all religious objects, in which (inventory) shall be entered all newly obtained objects for the religious cult either by purchase, donation, transfer from other prayer buildings, etc., which are not owned by individual citizens. Objects which become unfit for use shall be excluded from the inventory with the consent of the authority which concluded the contract;

f. admit, without any hindrance, the representatives of the city or district soviet to exercise control over the property with the exception of the time when religious ceremonies are performed.

30. Prayer buildings of historical or artistic value registered as such in the Ministry of Education may be leased to believers.
on the same conditions, however, with the obligation to observe the regulations prescribed for registration and maintenance and the guarding of monuments of art and antiquity.

31. All local inhabitants of a corresponding faith have the right to sign the contract on the receipt of the buildings and religious objects for use and to obtain by this, after the leasing of property, similar rights of management over the property with persons who signed the original document.

32. Whoever has signed a contract may cancel his signature on the above-mentioned contract by filing the corresponding application to the agencies enumerated in article 4; this, however, does not free him from the responsibility for the good condition and safekeeping of the property during the period to the time prior to the filing of the above-mentioned application.

33. Prayer buildings shall be subject to compulsory fire insurance for the benefit of the appropriate local government at the expense of the persons who signed the contract. In case of fire, the insurance payment may be used for the reconstruction of the prayer building destroyed by fire, or upon decision of the appropriate local government for social and cultural needs of a given locality in full accordance with the Decree of August 24, 1925, on the Utilization of Insurance Payments Acquired for Prayer Building Destroyed by Fire.
34. If there are no persons who wish to use a prayer building for the satisfaction of religious needs under the conditions provided for in Articles 27-33, the city or district soviet puts up a notice of this fact on the doors of the prayer buildings.

35. If, after the lapse of a week from the date of notice, no applications are submitted, the city or district soviet informs the higher authority. This information supplies data giving the date of the construction of the building and its condition, and the purpose for which the building is supposed to be used. The higher authority decides the further destination of the building in accordance with the provisions of Articles 40-42.

36. The transfer of a prayer building leased for the use of believers for other purposes (liquidation of the prayer building) may take place only according to a decision of the (Council of Ministers) of the autonomous republic or oblast which must be supported by reasons, in a case where the building is needed for government or public purposes. The believers who formed the religious society shall be informed regarding such decision.

37. If the believers who formed the religious society appeal to the (Council of Ministers) within two weeks from the date of the announcement of the decision, the case on the liquidation of the prayer building shall be conveyed to the Council. If the (Council) confirms the decision, the
contract with the believers becomes null and void, and the property shall be taken away from them.

38. The lease of nationalised or private houses for the needs of religious associations (Art. 10, par. 2) may be broken by a court decision in accordance with the general provisions of court procedure.

39. The liquidation prayer buildings may be carried out in some instances by the Committee for Religious Matters by order of the city or district soviet in the presence of representatives of the local finance department and other interested departments as well as the representative of the religious association.

40. The religious property of the liquidated prayer building shall be distributed as follows:

a. all objects of platinum, gold, silver and brocade as well as jewels shall be included in the account of the State fund and transmitted for disposal by local financial agencies or the Ministry of Education, if the objects were registered there;

b. all objects of historical, artistic or museum value shall be transferred to the Ministry of Education;

c. other objects, such as sacred images, priestly vestments, banners, veils and the like, which have special significance for the performance of religious rites shall be entrusted to believers for use in other prayer buildings premises; they shall be included in the inventory of religious property in accordance with the general rules;
d. such everyday objects as bells, furniture, carpets, chandeliers and the like shall be included in the account of the State fund and transmitted for disposal by local financial agencies or agencies of education if the objects were registered with these agencies;

e. so-called expendable property, such as money, frankincense, candles, oil, wine, wax, wood and coal, shall not be taken away if the religious association will continue to exist after the liquidation of the prayer building.

41. Prayer buildings and wayside shrines subject to liquidation, which are registered in special local agencies for State funds, may be transferred for use free of charge to proper executive committees or city soviets under the condition that they will be continuously considered as nationalized property and their use for other purposes than stipulated may not take place without the consent of the Ministry of Finance.

42. Special local agencies for State funds shall register only such liquidated prayer buildings as are not included in the register of the Ministry of Education, such as monuments of art, or (those which) may not be used by local soviets as cultural or educational establishments (schools, clubs, reading halls, etc.) or dwelling houses.
43. When the religious association does not observe the
terms of the contract or orders of the Committee for
Religious Matters (on re-registration, repair, etc.)
the contract may be annulled.

The contract may also be annulled upon the presentation
of lower executive committees by the (Council of Minis-
ters) of the autonomous republic, oblast, etc.

44. When the decision of the authorities mentioned in Article
43 is appealed to the (Council of Ministers) within two weeks,
the prayer building and property may actually be taken from
the believers only after the final decision of (the Council).

45. The construction of new prayer buildings may take place
upon the request of religious societies under the observa-
tion of the general regulations pertaining to construc-
tion and technical rules as well as the special conditions
stipulated by the Permanent Committee for Religious Matters
at the (Council of Ministers).

46. If the prayer building, because of dilapidation, threatens
to fall apart completely or partly, the Committee for
Religious Matters on the city or district soviet may request
the executive body of the religious society or the represen-
tative of the group of believers to discontinue temporarily
the holding of divine services and meetings of believers
in such building until examined by the technical committee.
47. Simultaneously with the requirement on the closing of the prayer building, the officials exacting such requirement shall ask the appropriate agency of construction control to make a technical examination of the building. A copy of the letter shall be given to the agency which concluded the contract upon the leasing of the building and property to believers.

48. The (following persons) shall be invited with the right of deliberative vote to the examination procedure by the technical committee:
   a. the local representative of the Ministry of Education, if the building is registered by the Ministry;
   b. the representative of the Committee for Religious Matters at the appropriate city or district soviet;
   c. the representative of the religious association.

49. The decision of the technical committee stated in the examination document is binding and subject to execution.

50. If the technical committee decides that the building threatens to collapse, the committee must also indicate whether the building shall be demolished or made safe if appropriate repairs are made. In such case, the (examination) document shall describe in detail the necessary repairs for the prayer building and the date of completion. The religious association may not hold prayer or other meetings in the building until the repair work has been completed.
51. If the believers refuse to carry out the repairs as indicated in the (examination) document of the technical committee, the contract for the use of the building and religious property shall be annulled according to the decision of the (Council of Ministers) of the autonomous republic or oblast.

52. If, as required by the decision of the technical committee, the building shall be demolished, the contract for the use of the building and religious property shall be annulled according to the decision of the (Council of Ministers) of the autonomous republic or oblast.

53. (Any decision for the demolition of the prayer building) shall be carried out by the Committee for Religious Matters at the city or district soviet and the expenses defrayed from the sale of building material remaining after the demolition of the building. Any money left over shall be transferred to the Treasury.

54. The members of the groups of believers and religious societies may pool money in the prayer building or premises and outside it by voluntary collections and donations, but only among the members of the given religious association and only for the purpose of covering the expenses for the maintenance of prayer building or premises and religious property, and for the salary of the clergy and activities of the executive bodies.
Any kind of compulsory collection of money for the benefit of religious associations is punishable under the provisions of the Criminal Code.

55. It is compulsory to enter in the inventory of religious property any kind of religious property, whether donated or purchased with the money received through voluntary donations.

The donations made for the purpose of beautifying the prayer building or religious property shall be entered in the general inventory of the religious property which is in use by the religious association free of charge.

All other donations in kind made for indefinite purposes, as well as donations in money to cover the upkeep of prayer buildings (renovation, heating, etc.), or for the benefit of the clergy shall not be subject to entry in the inventory. The donations in money shall be entered by the cashier in the account book.

56. Expenditures of donated money may be carried out by the members of the executive body in connection with the purposes for which they are donated.

57. Prayer meetings of believers who formed a society or group may be held, without notification to or permission of the authorities, in prayer buildings or specially adapted premises which comply with the technical and sanitary regulations.

Divine services may be performed in the premises not specially adapted for these purposes, if notification (is made) to the Committee for Religious Matters.
58. Any kind of religious ceremonies or rites or display of objects of the cult in the buildings belonging to the State, public, cooperative or private institutions or enterprises is prohibited. Such prohibition does not apply to the performance of religious rites in hospitals and prisoners, in specially isolated rooms, if requested by dangerously ill or dying persons, or to the performance of religious ceremonies in cemeteries and in crematoria.

59. A special permission (granted) for each case separately by the Committee for Religious Matters is required for the open air. An application for such permission must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the ceremony. Such permission is not required for religious processions connected with funerals.

60. Permission is not required for religious processions which are an inevitable part of the divine service and are made only around the prayer building, provided they do not disturb normal street traffic.

61. A permission of the agency which concluded the contract for the use of property is necessary for each religious procession as well as the performance of religious ceremonies outside the place where the religious association is situated. Such permission may be granted only with the agreement of the executive committee of the place where the procession or performance of ceremonies is supposed to take place.
62. A record of the religious societies and groups of believers shall be kept by agencies which register the religious association (Art. 6).

63. The registration agencies of religious associations (Art. 6) submit data to the Committee for Religious Matters at the city and district soviets in accordance with the forms and within the period established by the Permanent Committee for Religious Matters at the (Council of Ministers).

64. Surveillance over the activities of religious associations, as well as over the maintenance of prayer buildings and property leased to religious associations, shall be exercised by registration agencies, and in rural areas by village soviets.

Instructions of the People's Commissariat of the Interior of October 1, 1929 (as amended January 28, 1932) *

†. PURPOSE AND COMPOSITION

1. Citizens of the same cult, denomination, sect or doctrine who are 18 years of age or over may form religious societies or groups of believers for the joint satisfaction of their religious needs.

* Originally published in N. Orlewska, Zakon o religioznych RPFSR (The law concerning the religious associations of the RSFSR) (Moscow, 1930). According to the Law on the Permanent Central Committee and Local Committees on Religious Matters of May 30, 1931, for matters relating to the administration of churches, special committees at the Council of Ministers and city and district soviets were organized, which took over the activities formerly exercised by the People's Commissariat for the Interior. The Committee for Religious Matter at the Council of Ministers issued a new instruction on January 28, 1931, changing only the names of the authorities.
2. Believers who have formed a religious society or group may:
   a. perform religious rites;
   b. arrange prayer or general meetings of believers;
   c. manage religious property;
   d. conclude transactions of the civil law connected with the management of religious property and the performance of religious rites.

3. The religious associations may not:
   a. create mutual credit societies, poorhouses, charity schools, hospices, dormitories for the poor, funeral funds, etc;
   b. establish cooperatives, producing unions, and, in general, use the property at their disposal for any other purpose other than the satisfaction of religious needs;
   c. give material help to members of the association;
   d. organize special prayer or other meetings for children, youth, and women;
   e. organize scriptural, literary, sewing, labor or other meetings, groups, circles, sections, or such for teaching religion;
   f. organize excursions and children's playgrounds;
   g. organize libraries and reading rooms;
   h. organize health resorts and medical care.

Religious societies and groups do not enjoy the rights of a legal entity.

4. The membership of a religious society or group of believers may include only citizens who reside:
   a. in the same city;
   b. in the same city and vicinity;
c. in the same village; or
d. in several villages of the same district (raion).

5. A citizen may be a member of one religious association (society or group) of believers.

Persons who belong to several religious associations may be prosecuted in accordance with (The Criminal Code).

A citizen who desires to be a member of a religious association must submit a written or oral application to the executive body of the religious society or group of believers.

Members shall be accepted by the executive body or general assembly of the religious society or group of believers.

6. The activities of clergymen, preachers, preceptors, etc. are restricted to the area where the members of religious associations reside and to the place where the prayer premises are located.

The activities of clergymen, preachers, preceptors, etc., who permanently serve two or several religious associations, are restricted to the area where the believers who are members of these religious associations permanently reside.

A clergymen, preacher, preceptor, etc., may start his activities only after the date when the information respecting him has been submitted by the religious society or group of believers to the registration agency.