

SOME ANSWERS
TO THE QUESTION

IS THERE
FREEDOM OF RELIGION
IN THE
SOVIET UNION ?

BY
BRITISH, SCOTTISH AND
AMERICAN VISITORS TO THE
SOVIET UNION IN 1950 AND 1951.

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IS THERE FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN THE SOVIET UNION ?

The three following statements appear on pages 64-68 in the pamphlet "Russia With Our Own Eyes", the full, official report of the British Workers' Delegation to the Soviet Union, 1950. #

The introduction to this report states:

"We met for the first time on April 26 in London. We knew very little about each other.... Most of us readily admitted that our knowledge of the Soviet Union was very limited and in any case coloured by what we were accustomed to read in the newspapers and to hear on the British Broadcasting Company.

"But we were sent by our workmates to get at the truth and had brought with us many questions submitted at our factories and through our organizations. We told each other we would try to see things clearly and with an open mind."

THE U.S.S.R. AND RELIGION

By James H. V. Gillam

One of our requests was that we should visit a Church. On Sunday, April 30, 1950, we visited the Cathedral of the Coming of Christ in Moscow. This we found to be very crowded, and were informed by one of those employed by the Church that it was always crowded.

The congregation was composed of middle-aged and elderly people, both male and female, although it is only fair to say that females were in the majority. There was a sprinkling of young children, brought, no doubt, by their parents, but I could see no persons in about the twenties.

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We had an interesting chat with the Metropolitan Nikolai, who told us that he was entirely satisfied with the relationship between Church and State. As far as he was concerned, it had some advantages. Being entirely divorced from the State, he explained that the congregation was now composed of people who were religious, and not of people who came to Church because it was the thing to do.

The Church has a governing body composed of seven members known as a Synod. When the Church desires some assistance from the State, say a new school building for the education of those wishing to enter the Church, the Synod, which is in effect a Church Soviet, contacts the appropriate Government department, and provided they can show that a sufficient number of people are desirous of such a building, then agreement is reached.

At a later date, fourteen days' time to be precise, about six of us visited the Roman Catholic Church in Moscow and attended High Mass.

Again it was the same story. The congregation as regards size and composition was similar. During a discussion after the service with the priest, he confirmed all that I have previously stated. He stated, in addition, that he visited the sick, both in their homes and in the hospitals, and administered the Last Sacrament when it was desired.

In view of the complete detachment of Church from State and all that that entails, e.g., no religious education of any kind in the schools, we put it to the Reverend Father that religion would ultimately and inevitably die out. This was met by an emphatic "No", and I might add that after fourteen days in the U.S.S.R. we understood "no" whether in English or Russian.

My conclusion is therefore this: That whatever the composition or size of the congregations, the Churches are there, they are free and open for those who want them. There is this much to be said about religion in the U.S.S.R. No one religion is favored in preference to another.

THE CATHEDRAL OF THE COMING OF CHRIST

By Edward Hutton

The service had already started when we arrived at the Cathedral and we found that it was packed till the congregation spilled on to the steps of the building. We were taken by our guide to a side altar where we could see the congregation.

There were representatives of all age groups in attendance, but we noted that the majority were elderly people with a good proportion of children. The beautiful singing of the choir, and the chanting of the priest were very good to listen to and all our chaps were struck with the sincerity and devotion of the worshippers.

It was very moving to be present at all this in view of the propaganda in Britain that there is no religious freedom in the Soviet Union.

We had arranged to pay a short visit to the church and then to come back when the service was over to interview the Metropolitan Nikolai (his office is the equivalent of an Archbishop's) but many of the delegates were reluctant to leave as they were enjoying the singing so much. The feeling of religious fervour was much deeper than I have ever seen at home and we all noted the great respect which was shown to the church and its officials by our hosts and interpreters.

When we came back about one and a half hours later we found that although the service was finished, the church was still about half full of people praying.

We were introduced to the Metropolitan Nikolai. He said he knew the Archbishop of York and the Dean of Canterbury. He welcomed us to the church and invited questions.

We asked him about religious freedom and he told us that since the Revolution the Church was completely separated from the State, and consequently had complete freedom to manage its affairs.

The Church previously had been bound by the Tsar and its policy had been dictated by the State. Now there was complete separation and the Church was independent. Since conventions had been broken down, people came to the Church not for fashionable reasons but because they sincerely wanted to come.

He told us that the people contributed generously to the collection for the upkeep of the Church and that grants could be obtained for building and travel for the clergy. He had been able with the help of the Government to visit Britain. He had been chosen as a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference but had not been able to attend as he was refused a visa by the French Government.

He said that there were fifty churches of the Russian Orthodox in Moscow and twenty-two of other denominations, making a total of seventy-two in Moscow alone.

He said that there were three services on a Sunday and two services on week-days. He told us that the Synod was the controlling body and that there were seventy-five bishops in the U.S.S.R. with nineteen parish districts in the city of Moscow.

The Church has its own magazine and they can publish with complete freedom.

We asked the Metropolitan about the Church's part in the fight for peace. He said his church was proud to play its part in the prevention of war and he hoped more of our Church leaders would help.

One of the delegates said he had seen some beggars outside the Church and asked for an explanation. The Metropolitan said that begging and the Church were inseparable. It was a tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church. Beggars were regarded as the brothers of Christ and people paid homage to their dead by giving alms to the beggars. The beggars were religious fanatics who were so imbued with religious fervour that they chose a life of poverty living on the alms they received. Some of the beggars gave a portion of what they received to the Church. He pointed

out that there was no need for anyone to beg as they could get work of which there was plenty. They were guaranteed a job if they wanted one under the Soviet Constitution but they preferred this kind of life, believing that by mortifying the flesh they were purifying the soul and helping their fellow men.

Our comment on this was that although we didn't like to see beggars, it was purely a Church matter and that it showed that people are not forced to work if they choose not to.

After our discussion, the Metropolitan conducted us around the Cathedral to see the well-preserved holy paintings and the beauty of the furnishings and vestments.

ST. LUDOVIC'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

By Daniel W. Martin

The following delegates attended high mass on Sunday, May 14, 1950, at St. Ludovic's Church in Moscow.

Bro. Riley, Newcastle, Catholic; Bro. Gillam, London, Catholic; Bro. Devanny, London, Catholic; Bro. Hutton, Billingham, ex-Catholic; Bro. Martin, Aberdeen, ex-Catholic; Bro. Wilson, Glasgow, non-Catholic.

We set out with three interpreters and arrived shortly after mass had started.

We were given places near the altar and we noted that the church was full, worshippers giving up their seats for us, and kneeling instead in the aisle. The woman who ushered us in had the face of a saint. Her features were set white like marble and her eyes were full of conviction and sincerity.

It was obvious to those of us who were conversant with the mass that the Father's prayers and the choir's responses were identical with the universal service of the mass. Many people made their communion, the majority being women.

We left the church after the mass was finished when the priest started to make the announcements and the sermon.

We then had an interview with two women, one of whom said she was the housekeeper and the other was a member of the church committee.

We put several questions to them and got ready straight answers:

1. How many members in the parish? Approximately 2,000.
2. What services are held? Two Masses and Benediction in the evening.
3. How is the church maintained? By the congregation. But special grants can be had from the Government for additional expenditure, e.g., repairs to building.
4. Can anyone come to church? Yes, without reservations. To confirm this we saw a girl of about twelve going into church in the dress of a young Pioneer. One of the women volunteered the information that her husband was one of the old Bolsheviks.
5. Does the fact that a person is a Catholic retard his progress in the community? A very emphatic "No".
6. What is your feeling for Stalin? Stalin is a good man who has improved the welfare of the people and stands for peace.

We said we would like to see the priest so were conducted to the garden at the side of the church where an old gardener was pottering about.

The priest appeared shortly after and we introduced ourselves. He was a man of about forty-five of jovial appearance, and after we had introduced ourselves he invited questions.

We first asked if the church had ever been closed, and he said it had not. Its doors had been open since it was built in

1785. We asked him if he came under the jurisdiction of the Pope - he agreed and said that he was under the administration of the Archbishop of Riga. He said that there were Catholic Churches all over the U.S.S.R.

We asked if his religion was dying, but he was emphatic that it was not, and that they were converting more people to the faith. We asked if there was complete freedom of religion and he replied very simply that a clause is inserted in the Constitution of the country to ensure it. We could see for ourselves the deep sincerity of these people. These people are so sincere that they would face martyrdom for their faith.

The priest told us that there were three Seminaries for students for the priesthood in the U.S.S.R. When the student is training he is paid by the State. He told us that he visited homes and hospitals, celebrated marriages and performed the last rites without fear or hindrance.

We made a collection amongst ourselves and got quite a substantial sum of roubles for the collection to the housekeeper. Then with the blessing of the priest we took our leave.

As we left we saw the cars of many foreign embassies, American, French, etc. and the thought crossed my mind that the representatives of countries which accused the U.S.S.R. of suppressing religion were in the church on their knees praying to God.

They must realize that they are a party to a foul lie and they should speak out against it. We got another proof of religious freedom at the collective farms we visited, when we saw holy paintings in the houses of the farmers.

Identification of the Trade Unionists

Mr. James H. V. Gillam - Toolmaker in the instrument engineering industry. Employed at Smith's Clocks, Cricklewood Factory, London. Shop Steward. President Amalgamated Engineering Union Watford No. 4 Branch.

Mr. Edward Hutton - Inspector of crane-lifting gear at Imperial Chemical Industries, Billingham, North-East England. Shop

Steward. Member Amalgamated Engineering Union. Formerly Chairman Billingham Urban District Council. Chairman local Government Health Committee.

Mr. Daniel W. Martin - Fitter at Henderson Engineering Works, Aberdeen. Shop Stewards! representative on District Committee, Amalgamated Engineering Union. Member Executive of Aberdeen Trades Council. Chairman Scottish Section of Delegation to the Soviet Union.

MY VISIT TO A BAPTIST CHURCH

By Sephorah Davies, J.P.
Wife of S. O. Davies, M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil

I am attached to a Non-Conformist Church in Merthyr Tydfil. On our visit to the U.S.S.R. (November, 1950), I was determined to see for myself what truth there was in the oft-repeated charge of religious persecution in the Soviet Union. I had already learned that the Baptist Church and Evangelical Christians were established in Russia, and was anxious to find out whether they still flourished there.

Accordingly, I made a special request to our hosts in Moscow that I should be given an opportunity to visit the Baptist Church in Maly Busorsky Street, and on my last evening in the Soviet Union I went along there with one of our young Russian friends, Alla Kubitskaya (a graduate of Moscow University).

We were met in the church ante-room by the chairman of the All-Union Council of Baptists, a tall and slender, elderly man, whose friendly smile of welcome made it easy to talk to him and to ask him questions. With him was one of the elders of the church.

This and the following article appeared in January, 1951, issue of the monthly magazine Russia Today, a publication of the British-Soviet Friendship Society.

I opened the conversation with the remark that my reason for visiting his church was that there was a belief in my country that religion was being persecuted in the Soviet Union; and I wanted to see for myself whether this was true.

My remark evoked an immediate, spontaneous and sympathetic smile from the two men, and I was told that I should find for myself sufficient proof to the contrary when I entered the church and joined in the service.

The chairman explained that the Baptist Church had never been as free as it was now; it was quite independent of the State, but the Government was prepared to help when there was need of assistance for building purposes. People who were religious and wished to worship God came to church freely and in great numbers. They came because they wanted to and not because it was the fashion, or because it was expected of them. There were 4,000 members and the church was maintained by their contributions. Five full services were held each week: two on Sunday and one on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings.

Our conversation was interrupted by a long-distance telephone call from the chairman of a Baptist Church in Riga. I inquired then if there were many Baptist churches in the Soviet Union, and I was told that they numbered 3,000. Students who wished to enter the ministry studied at one of the theological academies or seminaries. They received a state grant or stipend like any other student at the colleges or universities.

Alla, my companion, and I attended the service and we were both impressed by the devotion of the congregation. It is an old church, plain and simple, well preserved and pleasantly decorated in light colours.

The church was more than full, that is to say, worshippers were even standing in the aisles; and I noticed the complete stillness and attention of everyone throughout the service. I had been told by the chairman that if I had come on a Sunday, I

would have had to push my way through a throng on the church steps.

On Sunday, too, the choir would be in full attendance, 100 in all, mainly composed of young people. There were about 40 in the choir on this Tuesday evening, singing hymns devoutly and sweetly to the accompaniment of the pipe organ. The congregation was composed mainly of women, but with a good many men and some children. Most of the women wore the favourite Russian winter head-dress - a white scarf or shawl.

The form of service was like our own in Wales. The sermon was delivered on this evening by the secretary of the Baptist Union (in the absence of the minister who was ill in hospital). And a most interesting and sensible sermon it was, on a text from St. John, Chapter 14. Alla translated it for me, and was herself greatly appreciative of its substance.

He spoke of the good heart and the evil heart, the good will and the evil will; that good should be an active force, not a passive, negative and spiritless thing. Love and the good will must strive together; heart and will must cooperate in active good works for the benefit of society, that is, for the benefit of all.

I was delighted when he quoted John Bunyan: "Will is the commander of the soul." Christ's will for mankind is: "Follow me," by which He meant, "do great works for my sake...."

It was a fine sermon and a beautiful service, simple and sincere. It was good to be among those Moscow Christians at their week-night service in their simple church.

ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTERS OF PEACE

By the Rev. Etienne Watts
Vicar of St. Gabriel's, Middleton Junction.

It might seem entirely unnecessary to write anything further about the position of religion in the U.S.S.R. The Dean of

Canterbury has explained the position quite clearly, and the Reverend Stanely Evans has written some excellent pamphlets. Besides these clergy, some lay people who have been to the U.S.S.R. on delegations have also reported their observations. All agree from their personal experience that there is freedom of worship, whether Christian, Jewish or Mohammedan, and that the Article in the Soviet Constitution guaranteeing this freedom is scrupulously adhered to in practice.

Moreover, the Church Times records from time to time a note of the vast crowds of worshippers at, for example, Christmas or Easter.

Because of this mass of evidence about the free practice of religion in the U.S.S.R., a line of anti-Soviet propaganda which is now being taken up is that the church is only allowed to function in so far as it supports the Soviet State, and is not therefore free. During my recent visit (November, 1950), I made a point of investigating this.

I talked with the Metropolitan Nikolai and also with some of the clergy in Tbilisi in Georgia. These are men of character and ability and cannot be charged with the *arriere pensée* that they can only survive by subservience to the state and therefore are willing to water down their religion.

These priests pointed out that the churches were open, that people went to them, that they felt they were making headway, that they had the privilege of buying anything necessary for worship at a special cheap rate, and also that although the congregation was responsible for the upkeep of the church building, yet when in difficulties they could apply for state aid.

Some of our delegation were able to visit the Cathedral in Tbilisi on a Sunday and found a packed congregation. In the tenth century church at Mkhthera, the ancient capital of Georgia, the interior was being completely restored at the state's expense.

On our long journey across the Ukraine, new towns had arisen to take the place of those demolished by the Fascist invaders

and in these, stately new churches were being built.

All the evidence goes to prove that the church is an entirely free institution and it appeared to me that the clergy are held in respect by all.

The answers to my further questions were illuminating. I was informed that not so many people attended church as in Tsarist days. Then everybody was obliged to attend. Now, only those who were really believers attended, which is a much more satisfactory state of affairs from every point of view.

The church is, as we should say, dis-established, which means that the schools are separate from the church, neither are there any theological faculties in the universities. How is this overcome? Children come to the church for instruction in religion when they or their parents desire it, and many do. There are several training colleges where men are prepared for the priesthood, one of which is an advanced theological college for more specialized training and thought.

I asked: "Is it easier or harder to live a Christian life under the Soviet regime than under Tsarism?" "Of course," came the answer, "it is far easier under the present system, for Christians and Communists have much in common. We both believe in the brotherhood of man without class distinctions, and we both believe in peace. Many unnecessary temptations have been removed by our present way of life."

The Russian Church supports the Soviet Government because of the splendid things the people are doing under its lead, without committing itself to the whole Communist philosophy. As Metropolitan Nikolai said: "The Communist Party has its philosophy and we have ours, but we get along very well together."

The Metropolitan Nikolai is a member of the Soviet Peace Committee along with several other bishops. One thing which they could not understand was the reluctance of the clergy in Britain to espouse the cause of the World Peace Committee and the Congress which was then due to be held at Sheffield.

All the clergy I spoke with were enthusiastic supporters of peace. They find it difficult to imagine that any Christians at all should have any hesitation in signing the Peace Petition. To them it is part and parcel of their religion.

And, indeed, this is the opinion of a large proportion of clergy and laity alike in the Soviet Union, where Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Protestants alike have their shoulders to the wheel and are furthering the cause of the peace of the world.

QUAKER MISSION TO MOSCOW

By Paul S. Cadbury

Vice-President of Cadbury Brothers, Ltd., Chocolate Works
Birmingham, England. Member of the British Quaker
Delegation to Moscow in July, 1951.

From the outset we were received with the greatest openness and frankness, not only by important people, but quite simple people with whom we obviously did not agree, but who seemed to appreciate the frank, open way in which we spoke the truth as we knew it.

We did not know what our agenda would be day by day. We asked to see certain things, and they did their utmost to show us the things we wanted to see, and to let us meet the people we wanted to meet. We did not ask for the impossible, but we did ask some quite odd things. For instance, Leslie Metcalf

From an address delivered at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, October 7, 1951. Published in pamphlet by American Friends Service Committee, 20 South 12th Street, Philadelphia 7, Pa., November, 1951.

asked to go down a coal mine. I asked to see a chocolate factory. Kathleen Lonsdale, who is a prison visitor in England, asked to see a prison. And in each case our requests were acceded to, and we did see these things. Speaking from my own experience at the chocolate factory, I was more impressed that it wasn't a showplace than if it had turned out to be a showplace. Although the factory was spotlessly clean, it was technically a long way behind our own practice.

In the course of our efforts to see as much as we could of Russia, we saw churches, museums, factories. We saw a collective farm, and going around in Moscow, in Kiev, and in Leningrad, we saw housing projects. We met quite a lot of ordinary people on these visits.

In addition, we met the leaders of the churches, and I would like to say here that not only did we meet the leaders of the Baptist Church and of the Orthodox Church, but on one of the first evenings we were there, we attended a most remarkable service in the great Baptist Church in Moscow.

In a church which would seat 1,500, with side galleries down each side, and a big gallery at the end, there were at that week-night service - they did not know that we were coming - about 1,800 people.

For an hour we took part in a simple, non-conformist service in which together, in spite of differences of language, we worshipped God, we sang well-known hymns, we heard a reading from the Bible, and a prayer.

And then Leslie Metcalf, who speaks a fair amount of Russian, addressed this great gathering, giving them the message of good will to all men which was approved by London Yearly Meeting in 1950, and of which a Russian translation was available. He finished by referring to the only text inscribed on the wall in this very simple church: God is love. He then brought us all to our feet for two or three minutes of complete silence. And, as I wrote in my diary that night, never before, and perhaps never again, shall I be so conscious of the presence of the living God.

We also took part in two services of the Orthodox Church. The next day we went down to the great monastery at Zagorsk where between 20 and 25 thousand people were milling about in the great campus, with its eleven beautiful churches with their blue and gold domes. The special celebration of St. Sergei's Day was being celebrated by patriarchs from three or four countries, by metropolitans, archemandrutes, archbishops and bishops in the most gorgeous processions.

I must admit that I stood in silence for an hour in the great cathedral amidst a milling throng - there must have been at least 7,000 people standing in a solid mass (they do not have seats in Orthodox Churches) - and watched and listened to a gorgeous service. Since then I have read the Russian liturgy and realize that the words were mostly the simple words of the Bible, but I must admit in all honesty that Friends' Meeting is no training ground for appreciation of the splendour of the Russian Orthodox service.

Friends here should know that there is real freedom to worship in Russia today, but I would say that it is freedom within a pretty narrow limit. I think that if worship led the worshippers to take a view contrary to the view of the State, it would be impossible to continue. We also knew, or found out, that there are no Sunday schools; nevertheless, I think it is important that we should realize that this freedom to worship God does exist (Pages 4-5).

THE FOUR AMERICANS QUESTION SOVIET UNION CHURCH LEADER

By The Reverend Robert W. Muir

Protestant Episcopal Clergyman of Boston
Co-director "Workers of the Common Life"

In November and early December, 1950, nineteen Americans were invited to visit the Soviet Union as guests of the Soviet Peace Committee. While there, these Americans talked with as many people as possible. Among those interviewed was the Metropolitan Nikolai of the Russian Orthodox Church. For an hour and

a half four of us conversed with the Metropolitan. We were Dr. Willard Uphaus of New Haven, Connecticut, the Reverend Massie Kennard of Chicago, the Honorable Charles P. Howard of Des Moines and the Reverend Robert W. Muir of Boston. We asked questions such as the following:

Q. Does the Russian Orthodox Church support the peace program of the Soviet Union?

A. The Russian Orthodox, and all other Russian churches, as well as Soviet citizens are banded together in the struggle for peace. The Church has been with the people in time of war, in hard times, and will continue to struggle for peace.

Q. Is the Church supporting the reconstruction program of the State?

A. The Church supports the State in any program that will help the people of the country. Since the Government's program is one of building up the country for peaceful purposes, the Church supports it.

Q. Do you believe the present State regime fulfills the social ideals of religion?

A. The social ideals of religion - love, justice, equality, brotherhood, peace - are integral parts of the present Soviet system. Not only theoretically but realistically is this the case. The Government is building for peace. All the people are equal. There is sincere brotherhood and true friendship between the peoples of our country. The Government teaches love for labor and duty to humanity, along with love, justice, equality, which help in the development of people and in living together.

Q. Is the Church growing?

A. The Church has always had a large membership. Whereas in Tsarist days attendance and support were required, attendance and support are now voluntary. Therefore, the devotion is much greater.

Q. Does the new democracy offer a better chance for spiritual and religious growth?

A. Yes, because there is complete separation of Church and State. We are for the first time allowed to be the Church.

Q. Does the Government carry on any atheistic propaganda against the Church or persecute the Church?

A. As I indicated, there is complete separation of Church and State. The State does not interfere in matters pertaining to the Church, and the Church does not interfere in matters pertaining to the State. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 guarantees absolute freedom of religion as well as atheism. The anti-God leagues that were formed were purely voluntary associations and entirely divorced from the Government.

Q. Does the Russian Orthodox Church have an agreement with the State similar to the Roman Catholic and other Churches' agreement with the Polish and Hungarian Governments?

A. There is no such agreement, nor is there any need because of our Constitution.

Q. Do clergy have the right to criticize the Government?

A. The clergy's job is not to criticize the Government but to teach and preach our sacred religion. All of his time is spent delving into religious matters and not into politics. As a citizen of the Soviet Union, however, he has the right to engage in the discussions of the problems of our country.

Q. How is the Church supported?

A. The Church is supported by the community of believers.

Q. What about religious training?

A. The Church maintains ten Middle Schools (corresponding to American high schools) and three Academies (corresponding to American colleges and universities) with an average attendance of from three to four hundred in each.

READ REPORTS OF OTHER AMERICANS WHO VISITED

THE SOVIET UNION in 1950 and 1951.

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By Dr. John A. Kingsbury

Former Commissioner of Charities, City of New York.
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