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The Plurality of Soviet Religious "Policy"

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THE PLURALITY OF SOVIET RELIGIOUS “POLICY”

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This thesis is dedicated to all of the history teachers whose love of the profession and indispensable advice have inspired its creation, my family and friends for their constant support, and, most importantly, God for granting me His guidance, strength, and patience, without which I would have failed long ago.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .............................................................................................................................................v

1. INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................1

2. LENIN AND RELIGION.........................................................................................................6
   2.1 Early Anti-Religious Legislation ...................................................................................8
   2.2 Overt Action against the Russian Orthodox Church ....................................................16
   2.3 Stalin and the Russian Orthodox Church .....................................................................22

3. THE CONFUSED POLICY TOWARD ISLAM ..................................................................33
   3.1 Anti-Religious Policy Implementation ........................................................................34
   3.2 The *Hudjum* and the Push to Destroy Islam ..........................................................41

4. WORLD WAR II AND THE CESSATION OF POLICY ...................................................48
   4.1 The Church to the Rescue ............................................................................................48
   4.2 Soviet Islam Policy Contradictions ..............................................................................53

5. KHRUSHCHEV’S CONTINUATION OF STALIN ...........................................................59
   5.1 A Reversal of Stalin’s Policy? .....................................................................................61
   5.2 Khrushchev’s Floundering Policy Toward Islam ......................................................68

6. BREZHNEV AND DÉTENTE .............................................................................................73
   6.1 The Russian Orthodox Church and the Dissidents ......................................................74
   6.2 Nationalism and the Invasion of Afghanistan ............................................................81

7. GORBACHEV AND THE MILLENNIUM .........................................................................88
   7.1 The Road Toward Religious Freedom ..........................................................................88
   7.2 A New Freedom of Conscience Law ...........................................................................93

8. CONCLUSION .....................................................................................................................99

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................109
Biographical Sketch .....................................................................................................................113
This thesis examines and analyzes the Soviet Union’s religious policies through a comparison of policy toward the Russian Orthodox Church and that toward Islam. It explains the differences in religious policy between each Soviet leader, while further breaking down each leader’s policies for both religions. It argues that a universal Soviet religious policy did not exist, each Soviet leader instead creating his own religious policy. It furthermore argues that the Soviet ideology of Leninist-socialism was not the motivating factor in the formation of policy, but that the personal goals of each leader, as well as the inherent need to protect the state’s power and image, comprised the main factors in policy creation. The scope of this thesis is the entire span of the Soviet Union’s existence.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There is not an overabundance of resources that describe Soviet religious policy. Several archival readers and document histories exist which provide raw legislation concerning religion, and there is a scarce corpus of scholarly work on Soviet religious policy that is spread out across the Soviet Union’s existence and beyond, each succeeding book building upon the foundation created by the book or article before it. Unfortunately, these sources all tend to recite the same repetitive idea that Soviet religious policy was focused on the eradication of religion. While it is true that official Soviet ideology demanded the eradication of religion before the establishment of communism could take effect, it does not mean that Soviet religious policy was entirely oriented toward this end. This study seeks to provide a new perspective on Soviet religious policy through a closer examination of the primary sources and the nuances of the secondary sources to prove that Soviet religious policy should be viewed in a different light. Its subject is important because this reevaluation of Soviet religious policy casts doubt on the state’s ideological faithfulness to Leninist-socialism toward religion.

If one studies the historiography of Soviet religious policy it becomes painfully obvious as different sources are compared by publication year that scholarly understanding of Soviet religious policy is a progression of thought. As more information from Soviet archives became open to the public, each succeeding article, monograph, or essay took the existing literature and built directly from its premises, merely adding new documentation to support the same arguments. In fact, almost the entirety of Soviet religious scholarship can be summed up in two main arguments: firstly, that the Soviet government created legislation specifically to oppress religious organizations which it improved over time to combat the churches’ responses, and secondly, that the Soviets did not strictly adhere to its legislation and often acted in opposition to the statutes dedicated to the control of religion in the Soviet Union. The defining force behind historiographical development has not been to diversify the argument that was originally produced in the 1930s, but to support it.

Some of the earlier scholarly works on Soviet religious policy include historians obviously influenced by agendas: Fr. James A. Cleary’s 1931 monograph *War on God in Russia* (funded by the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland) and Serge Bolshakoff’s 1942 monograph *The
Christian church and the soviet state (a Christian’s perspective on religious policy). Other historians answered the call to explain religion’s treatment in the Soviet Union in search of greater understanding, but still with obvious bias, as Paul Anderson’s 1944 People, Church and State in Modern Russia shows. Anderson explains how Marxist thought tied into Soviet religious policy, but also openly admits his admiration for the struggle given by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to maintain its legitimacy since he has worshipped with them. The scholarship fluctuated in terms of bias and scope after World War II. John Shelton’s 1953 The Russian Church and the Soviet State, Walter Kolarz’s 1961 Religion in the Soviet Union, and Robert Conquest’s 1968 Religion in the USSR all vary tremendously in the level of bias and areas of focus within religious policy. All three are written from the viewpoint of the ROC, as the literature before them had been. This perspective naturally portrays the ROC, the largest religion in the Soviet Union, as a victim to the harsh religious persecution of the state.

The turbulent 1960s began producing revisionist historians; these historians contested the Orthodox-oriented, status quo interpretations offered by historians before them. Bodhan Bociurkiw’s 1969 article “Church-State Relations in the USSR,” Gerhard Simon’s 1974 Church, State and Opposition in the U.S.S.R., and David Powell’s 1975 Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion are representative of this revisionist reinterpretation of Soviet religious policy. These sources utilize the state’s viewpoint instead of the ROC’s viewpoint, probably a result of Brezhnev’s liberal stance as historians had access to even more documents. Since the leaders before Brezhnev were exceedingly harsh in their religious persecution, the ROC’s viewpoint was a natural angle from which to analyze state policies. The shift in focus from the persecution of the ROC to the policies of the Soviets signaled a reevaluation of state actions from the state’s perspective to better understand it.

Books in the 1980s explained religious policy from the state’s view as well, but as 1988 drew closer and closer many historians chose to write comprehensive histories of the millennium of Christianity in Russia or explain the shifts in religious policy as the Millennium Celebration approached; an example of this is Francis House’s 1988 Millennium of Faith: Christianity in Russia, AD 988-1988. Scholarly understanding of Soviet religious policy benefited from the proliferation of state documents after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for historians could now write about themes within religious policy and show through government documentation how policy was formulated, as John Anderson’s 1991 “The Council for Religious Affairs and the

The historiography of Soviet religious policy toward Islam is much smaller. Few earlier scholarly books cared about policy toward the Muslims of Central Asia initially, and it was not until the late 1960s that any literature was published concerning Islam. Much of these works were chapters within more comprehensive religion books; Alexandre Bennigsen’s 1967 Islam in the Soviet Union and William Fletcher’s 1967 Religion and the Search for new ideals in the USSR are two such books. Islam was handled more extensively by the mid-1980s onward, though many of these focused on more recent events instead of the full history of Islam in the Soviet Union. Alexandre Bennigsen is an authority in the field of Soviet Islam, coauthoring several books and articles, as well as writing his own work, including his 1988 article “Unrest in the World of Soviet Islam” and 1989 coauthored book Soviet strategy and Islam. Works that developed in the 1990s for Islam were able to diversify in topic like those for the ROC. Moonis Ahmar’s 1991 “Implications of Perestroika for the Soviet Asian Republics,” Ludmila Polonskaya’s 1994 Islam in Central Asia, and Mehrdad Haghayegh’s Islam and politics in Central Asia are all examples of scholarly works from this time.

My study explores Soviet religious policy from the perspective of a comparison between the ROC and Islam, an idea that has not truly been accomplished before now. This comparison between two different religions allows for a greater understanding of how Soviet religious policies truly differed from one another depending on the political, economic, and strategic concerns surrounding each religion. When these differences are brought to the light, the extent of Soviet deviation from Leninist-socialism and the myriad influences on religious policies can be observed. My potential audiences are primarily Soviet historians, religious historians for the ROC and Islam, and Cold War historians, though religious scholars in general may also find value in this study.

My primary sources are greatly helpful and deeply flawed simultaneously. Many of my primary documents were written by Soviet authors, including state officials, atheist writers, and propaganda organizations. The rest were written either by Western authors sympathetic to the plight of religion in the Soviet Union, or by religious officials and dissidents. Remarkably, the least biased documents I employ are inter-department government documents, for these sources
accurately explain officials’ and departments’ views on different subjects. I account for these inherent biases by relating the content of these sources to the authors who wrote them, i.e., if I use a document written by Lenin, I explain in my explanation that this was his view while also noting intended audience and any other influence that could have influenced bias in his writing. Also, the majority of the primary documents are quoted. In this way the original publications are seen and explained, with their biases revealed in my explanation. While I use no unique sources, each of my sources is appropriate for this study because they reveal the behind-the-scenes actions and beliefs of Soviet officials as well as provide examples of how propaganda was implemented in comparison to the legal documents that governed them.

The arguments of this thesis are arranged chronologically and explain religious policy as it was formed and amended by each Soviet leader. In the second chapter I argue that a comparison of Lenin and Stalin’s religious policies reveals the Soviet trend of creating a double standard in religious policy. The official state policy adhered to Marxist socialism while the practical implementation of this policy was instead influenced by the personal views of each leader and the state’s overwhelming need to protect its power and image, both abroad and domestically. These influences were often accomplished through a liberal interpretation of the law or through going outside of the law. In the third chapter I argue that Lenin and Stalin’s policies toward Islam differed from those for the ROC, proving that different policies were enforced for different religions. State misunderstandings about Islam, the nature of Islam, and the inefficacy of Soviet propaganda all contributed to a necessarily different state approach to Islam. In the fourth chapter I argue that the stresses of wartime forced Stalin to treat the ROC and Islam in the same manner because he needed the support from these groups, and because he needed to focus on the war. By initially rewarding religious organizations for their contributions during wartime, Stalin unwittingly allowed religious groups to have power over how he implemented his religious policy after the war due to their international connections and political uses.

In the fifth chapter I argue that Khrushchev’s initial policy was so harsh that he was forced to change his policy. From 1954-1959, he built up ideological support among communists so that by 1960 atheist propaganda was once again prosperous. He exercised stricter state control over religion, so much so that Islam was driven underground where it prospered. In the sixth chapter I argued the Brezhnev’s relaxed religious persecution allowed him to focus on atheist propaganda and on tightening up the enforcement and consequences for the existing legislation.
As intelligentsia dissidents and Party division caused his policy to become indecisive, his control over the quality of atheist propaganda slipped as well and citizens became disinterested in the anti-religious campaign. In his policy toward Islam, however, he succeeded in building better relations with Muslim countries in the Middle East—that is until he invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and stepped up his religious persecution to protect the state from the political Islamic ideas of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. In the seventh chapter I argue that Gorbachev’s introduction of perestroika, which allowed him to gather like-minded, liberal officials around him, and glasnost, which ROC officials used to further the growth of religion, led to his loss of control over religion. His particular interest in refuting Western anti-Soviet propaganda and presenting a good image of the Soviet government caused him to loosen up his religious policy even further. Once Islamic officials saw the freedoms that the ROC had gained, they pressured him into allowing them to receive concessions as well.

Instead of explaining away the Soviet state’s policies toward religion as primarily influenced by Leninist-socialist ideology, I seek to prove that a uniform “Soviet religious policy” did not exist. My hope is that a chronology of Soviet religious policy’s formation and adaptation, when compared with the external influences that shaped Soviet views and the individual beliefs of each Soviet leader, will show that a whole new religious policy was created to fit the goals of each Soviet leader. While this unique perspective has not previously received the detailed attention and explication that this study provides, that is not to say that its implications are limited to its originality. The main thesis of this study is that multiple religious policies existed within the Soviet Union, both for each leader and for each religion, by comparing Soviet policies toward the ROC and Islam. I further argue that the Leninist-socialist ideology was not the driving force behind the religious persecutions and policy developments of the Soviet state; instead, the personal goals and drive to protect the state’s power and image of each leader were largely what created their religious policies.
CHAPTER TWO

LENIN AND RELIGION

Any elucidation of Soviet religious policies must begin with the original concepts of religion according to Lenin. Lenin was influenced by Marx’s views on religion, but took it a step farther by severely criticizing the idea of religion. Marx’s overly-quoted statement that religion is the opium of the masses does not mean what many believe it does. When put into context it is apparent that Marx pitied those who desperately clung to religion. “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of soulless stagnation. It is the opium of the people.”1 As Robert Conquest explains, “we can summarize this humane and sensitive passage by saying that in Marx’s view those deprived of real satisfactions in the real world compensate themselves by inventing or accepting comforting fantasies.”2 Lenin did not like this interpretation, for he saw the tremendous influence religion held over the people as a potential danger if it mobilized believers against the coming communist age in its own defense.3 He misinterpreted Marx’s views on religion and created a view that became increasingly antagonistic toward religion. “All modern religions and Churches, all religious organizations, Marxism always regards as organs of bourgeoisie reaction serving to defend exploitation and to stupefy the working class.”4 By relating his personal view of religion to Marxism, Lenin had laid the foundations for a state ideology that claimed to be Marxist but enforced his views.

The relationship between the ROC and the state throughout history seemed to justify Lenin’s hostility.5 The Russian Tsars had traditionally supported the ROC because of the ROC and state’s belief in the Third Rome theory. This theory, which developed in Russia after the fall

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3 For the purposes of this thesis, the uppercase Communist refers to the Russian political Party by that name or the collective feelings and actions of the Russian Communist Party members, while the lowercase communist refers to the idea of communism or individual communists.
5 For the purposes of this thesis the capitalized term “Church” will refer to the Russian Orthodox Church and not the Catholic Church, as the focus is on this group. Similarly, this term discounts the various Orthodox Churches within the Soviet Union (like the Georgian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches) and focuses solely on the Church headed by the Moscow Patriarchate.
of Constantinople in 1453, claimed that Russia had replaced the Byzantine Empire as the bastion of Christianity. Christendom would survive as long as the ROC survived, making it the Russian Tsar’s responsibility to support and protect the Church. Since the Tsar was believed to have derived his power from God, the Third Rome theory dictated that he would lose his authority if the ROC was overthrown like Constantinople had. The government accordingly manifested its support by providing state aid for religious endeavors, enforcing the commands of the Orthodox clergy, and fighting the ROC’s enemies.

The Tsar’s guaranteed protection allowed the ROC to proliferate even outside of Russia and enabled the clergy to boldly say and act as they willed. Lenin saw the poverty of the Russian peasantry in relation to the wealth of the Church, the myriad abuses of the Church, and the corruption within the clergy. He also witnessed the inefficiency and seemingly willful ignorance Tsar Nicholas II displayed toward the people’s problems, which further exemplified the negative influence the ROC exerted on the Russian government and people. The ROC, which symbolized all organized religion to the government as the most popular religion in Russia, needed to be liquidated so that the welfare of the people could again prosper in Russia under a socialist-democratic state.

In his 1905 essay entitled “Socialism and Religion,” Lenin emphasized the need to separate the state from the interests and influence of religion, going as far as to claim that religion should simply leave the state alone:

> The state must not concern itself with religion; religious societies must not be connected with the state power. Everyone should be absolutely free to profess whatever religion he prefers or to recognize no religion… There must be no discrimination whatever in the rights of citizens on religious grounds… no state grants must be made to ecclesiastic and religious societies which must become absolutely independent, voluntary associations of like-minded citizens.⁶

Lenin’s personal opposition toward religion is noticeably absent in this excerpt. Where is his belief that religion was the opium of the masses, a tool whose function was to placate the people into accepting their abysmal circumstances? At this early stage Lenin was already fostering a double standard that called for public acceptance of, and hidden resistance toward, religion.

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In this essay Lenin also made a clear distinction between the views of the Communist Party and the official ideology of the state. Instead of conforming to the standard Western Marxist stance in which religion was the private affair of each citizen, the Communist Party under Lenin would actively participate in systematic antireligious propaganda to eliminate the religious inclinations of the Russian citizenry. The state would not undertake these actions directly and would instead ensure that certain core beliefs were carried out. Among these beliefs were the constitutional freedom of conscience, the separation of church and state, the secularization of education, and the nationalization of all religious landholdings.\(^7\) Through enforcing these tenets the state could claim to be a communist government, even though the Party members who ran it would later act in accordance with Leninist-Marxism instead of pure communism. Little did Lenin know that this double standard of advocating tolerant legislation and enforcing contradictory action would become the trademark of the government that would develop a few short years later.

**EARLY ANTI-RELIGIOUS LEGISLATION**

The spontaneous February Revolution in 1917 resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the formation of a Provisional Government under Aleksander Kerensky. The beginnings of what would become Soviet religious policies occurred during Kerensky’s brief tenure from February to October 1917. Kerensky ended the official status of the ROC specifically and placed light restrictions on religious organizations. Firstly, the government created a law in July 1917 that guaranteed the freedom of religious profession, freedom to change religion, and the freedom to profess no religion at all. During this interim period the law was a proclamation that the ROC would no longer be considered in a favorable light, though it was a statement that impacted all religions. Secondly, all parochial schools were placed under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Education and compulsory religious education was made optional.\(^8\) While these changes limited the role and power of religion, they were in line with the spirit of the July law. Lenin realized that if he was able to lead the Bolsheviks in overthrowing the Provisional Government to establish a communist government, he would be able to lead it and thereby enforce his

\(^7\) Ibid.

conceptions of the struggle against religion. He saw an opportunity to eradicate religion once and for all through political force, an opportunity he would seize.

In October 1917, Lenin’s Bolsheviks overthrew Kerensky’s government and caused governmental power to reside in the workers’ soviets (councils). The new Communist government with Lenin as its informal leader immediately began attacking religion. Landed estates, including monasteries and church lands, were nationalized and placed under state control; state subsidies for churches, clergy, and religious ceremonies ceased; and state control over education expanded to include seminaries. In the public sphere divorce laws were relaxed, civil marriage took precedence over religious weddings, and the registration of births and deaths was given to the civil authorities to handle. These changes were not yet law but were informal actions taken against religion. The Communists encountered opposition from all sides, but religious groups reacted strongly against them in particular. Religious believers’ outrage further fueled the Communists’ hatred of religion, for they believed that religion was, as Bodhan Bociurkiw explains it, “a reactionary and unscientific ideology, born out of man’s fear and ignorance, and exploited by the dominant classes with the help of the clergy in order to dupe the toiling masses and thus thwart their revolutionary impulses.”

It is easy to understand the Communists’ logic. These initial actions merely took Lenin’s belief of the separation of church and state and advanced it a step further by preventing the ROC from having financial strength. These were not attacks on individual believers; these were attacks on the political power and strength of the ROC. According to the Communists, the religious believers attacked their measures because of the manipulative influence of the ROC. Walter Kolarz goes as far as to claim that they believed the ROC used the divine elements of its services to indoctrinate believers to oppose communism, for the Communists were unable to separate the divine elements of Christianity from the political, human elements of its clergy. Simply put, Kolarz claims that they only saw religious believers as opponents of communism

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9 The Bolsheviks had taken over the Russian government, but it would be many years before the various Soviet created by the Bolsheviks were united into the Soviet Union. For the sake of simplicity, all references to the Bolshevik Party refer to the Party in Russia that initially assumed power while all references to the Communist Party refer to the Bolshevik Party once in power in Russia, as opposed to other Communist parties in territories that eventually joined the Russian Soviet on December 28, 1922. The term Soviet will be avoided in this chapter until the Soviets’ unification occurs, at which point it will refer to the collective Soviet Union.

10 Ibid.

11 Bociurkiw, “Church-State Relations,” 80.
with the ROC as their instrument to fight it.\textsuperscript{12} Regardless of Communist views of the ROC itself, the state policy toward religion was confined to separating the church from the state. That is, until the Patriarch wrote a letter denouncing the government.

The Patriarchate had been outlawed by Peter the Great in 1721, and the ROC decided to convene a \textit{sobor} (a council of bishops representing the Church as a whole) to elect a Patriarch for the first time since it had been outlawed. Vasily Belavin was elected on November 10, 1917 to become Patriarch Tikhon, just in time to see the beginning changes the Communists made concerning religion. In response to these attacks he wrote a letter urging the Orthodox believers to resist the government, published January 19, 1918. In bold wording that reflects Tikhon’s certainty that the regime would not last against the power of the ROC, he condemned the state’s actions with a vengeance:

\begin{quote}
The open and secret enemies of the Truth of Christ have begun to persecute it and are striving to destroy Christ’s Cause by sowing everywhere, in place of Christian love, the seeds of malice, hatred and fratricidal strife... Bethink yourselves, ye senseless, and stop your bloody retributions. For that which you are doing is not only a cruel deed; it is in truth a Satanic deed, for which you shall suffer the fire of Gehenna in the future life beyond the grave, and the terrible curse of posterity in the present life on earth.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

This message against the Communists made Tikhon popular among the anti-communist White Guard, the collective name of those who rebelled from Communist rule and who began battling them soon after they had come to power. Tikhon went on to call the clergy to defend the Church, asking them to encourage their congregations to continue in revering their faith:

\begin{quote}
And you, Brethren Hierarchs and Clergy, without delay for an hour in your ecclesiastical action, but with a fiery zeal, call your children to defend the Orthodox Church; but call them to take their place in the ranks of spiritual fighters who will confront external force with the strength of their confession. And we firmly believe that the enemies of the Church will be put to shame, and will be scattered by the power of the Cross of Christ, for the promise of the Divine Bearer of the Cross Himself is immutable.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 37.
The state did not appreciate the new Patriarch’s efforts to stop them and the efforts of other religions to accomplish the same. This is why, a mere four days after the Patriarch’s letter, the Council of People’s Commissars (the Soviet Narodnykh Kommissarov, or Sovnarkom) created a decree “On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church.”\(^\text{15}\) This decree made into law the previous actions taken against religious organizations—including separating the church and state, outlawing public religious instruction, and nationalizing all religious landholdings—and added several new demands that further restricted religious organizations, including the conditions that religious rites could not disturb public order or interfere with the rights of citizens, that religious societies could only perform religious rites (as opposed to undertaking charitable activities, fundraisers, etc.), that they were not allowed to impose compulsory fees or contributions, and that they could not “punish” their members in any way.\(^\text{16}\)

Three of the restrictions stand out from the rest in their audacity and effect. Article 12 states that “No church or religious associations have the right to own property. They do not possess the rights of juridical persons.”\(^\text{17}\) Article 13 expands the former restriction, stating that “The property of all church and religious associations existing in Russia is pronounced the property of the People. Buildings and objects especially used for the purposes of worship shall be let, free of charge, to the respective religious associations, by resolution of the local, or central state authorities.”\(^\text{18}\) The January 23\(^{rd}\) decree also ensured in Article 3 that “All restriction of rights, involved by professing one of another religious belief, or by professing no belief at all, are cancelled and void,” which is even more hypocritical than the other items listed in the decree.\(^\text{19}\)

These constraints reveal the same double standard approach to religious policy that Lenin had established early on; if a religious organization must rent the tools necessary for the

\(^{15}\) Unfortunately, there are two different dates that have been quoted by various authors for the same document. One date is January 20\(^{th}\), the day after the Patriarch’s letter, and the other is the date used in this thesis, January 23\(^{rd}\). This document also has two different names: “Decree on the Freedom of Conscience, and of Church and Religious Societies” and “Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church,” though both refer to the same document.

\(^{16}\) Bociurkiw, “Church-State Relations,” 75. Punishment in this case could include the paying of tithes, performing acts of penitence, or any number of priest-proscribed acts, it probably was geared toward ascetics.


\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 32.
performance of its services then that organization is dependent on the state, which makes a mockery of the idea that the church is separate from the state or free in any way. These legal restrictions would allow the government to manipulate religious sects and apply pressure until that final fatal blow liquidating religion was dealt.\textsuperscript{20} Lenin’s hypocritical approach to state versus Party doctrine is evident in this first major legal document produced by the Communist Party, which proclaimed the freedom of religion in the same document that took rights away from religious bodies.

As the new restrictions reveal, the issue at hand was not the dissemination of atheist ideology but merely the consolidation of power over religious groups—especially the ROC. Before the Revolution Lenin had encouraged religious believers to become communists and join the Party, ordering that their convictions should not be held against them. Also, the Central Committee of the Communist government overlooked the religion of Party members if they had been in favor of the Revolution and had defended it when in danger.\textsuperscript{21} This is not to say that Lenin had suddenly accepted religion, but instead that he was initially interested in destroying religion instead of promoting atheism as the state ideology.

David Powell believes that the Russian Communist Party created a program of secularization to neutralize religion in the different Soviets, one that did not involve atheist propaganda. This plan had four objectives:

(1) the separation of the political system from religious ideologies and ecclesiastical structures, (2) the performance by political authorities of socioeconomic functions currently carried out by organized religion, (3) the restructuring of the political culture to emphasize temporal goals and rational, pragmatic means to achieve them, and (4) the elimination of any vestige of religious belief or practice and the creation of a completely atheist society.\textsuperscript{22}

Powell goes on to convincingly argue that the first two goals were realized quickly through the state’s application of terror and legislation, but that the latter goals had not yet been achieved by the time of his writing, 1975.\textsuperscript{23} The harsh treatment of priests in the Russian Soviet Federated

\textsuperscript{20} Bociurkiw, “Church-State Relations,” 75-76.
\textsuperscript{21} Kolarz, Religion, 4.
\textsuperscript{22} Powell, Anti-Religious, 5.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
Socialist Republic (RSFSR) is an example of how the Communists pursued the first two goals and also shows how the latter two goals were not yet achievable.

The RSFSR Constitution was passed on July 10, 1918 and included several articles concerning religion. Article 65 took away the suffrage rights of priests and the legality of being a priest as a profession, disfranchising them. Disfranchised people were not allowed to receive ration cards, could not belong to trade unions which automatically disqualified them for any state jobs, could not send their children to schools above the elementary level, were forced to pay higher rents for their dwellings, and were subjected to higher tax rates. Religious education was prohibited by the freedom of conscience law of January 23, 1918 in state and public schools and allowed in private schools, but that was abolished with the introduction of the June 13, 1921 decree on religious instruction which prevented any form of religious education for groups of people under the age of eighteen. The Family Code of October 22, 1918 took away the legal recognition of church marriages and divorces that occurred after the date of the decree, leaving priests not much they could do in terms of employment. By attacking the priests, who were necessary for the performance of rituals for many religions, the state hoped to stop religion altogether.

These laws carried out the abovementioned plan in the first two of its objectives. For the first objective, the disfranchisement of priests separated the ecclesiastical structures from the political system for priests could not function legally in state jobs as a disfranchised person. For the second, they took away all economic functions of religion by discontinuing income generated from baby dedications, baptisms, marriages, divorces, and funerals, as well as all charitable activities. The state’s treatment of the priests shows how the third and fourth objectives were a much longer-term part of the plan and could not be accomplished through restriction of the priests, though this was part of the plan. The state hoped to force religion to die on its own through making religion irrelevant and ineffective, while the Party would perform powerful anti-religious propaganda and assist the state. The Secret Department (SD) of the Cheka, a state security agency created by Lenin before the Revolution, had been persecuting ROC priests specifically since the Revolution using the tactic of propaganda.


A decree written by the Eighth Party Congress shows how the Party itself would employ the second tactic. This decree, entitled “On Religion,” shows the Party’s stance toward religion by the time of this congress, March 18-23, 1919:

With reference to religion, the All-Russian Communist party does not content itself with the already decreed separation of church from state... The All-Russian Communist Party is guided by the conviction that only the realization of conscious and systematic social and economic activity of the masses will lead to the disappearance of religious prejudices. The aim of the Party is finally to destroy the ties between the exploiting classes and the organization of religious propaganda, at the same time helping the toiling masses actually to liberate their minds from religious superstitions, and organizing on a wide scale scientific-educational and anti-religious propaganda. It is, however, necessary carefully to avoid offending the religious susceptibilities of believers, which leads only to the strengthening of religious fanaticism.26

This last sentence reflected Lenin’s personal belief that offending the religious convictions of believers only strengthened their resolve to practice it. As Francis House remarks, “Lenin himself acknowledged the truth of the observations that ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,’ and he vainly warned his followers against creating martyrs by open persecution.”27 He “vainly” warned them because the Communists were harsh in their treatment of believers.

The state began lying to the international community about their religious policies early on. One such instance was a letter from Georgy Chicherin, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, to Cardinal Gasparri of the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Benedict XV had received a telegram from Archbishop Silvestr of the ROC on February 7, 1919 in which he cited numerous instances of horrendous persecution of the church, including the assassination of “the Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev, nearly twenty Bishops, and hundreds of priests,” the use of arms against religious processions, and “licentiousness in the most disorderly passions.”28 Cardinal Gasparri telegraphed Lenin on April 2, 1919 to demand a cessation of hostilities toward the ministers of all religions, in response to which Georgy Chicherin telegraphed Gasparri the same


day. In his telegraph Chicherin informed Gasparri that “the separation of Church and State [has] been accomplished in Russia, religion is treated there as a private matter,” although the government had imposed heavy restrictions half a year before. As a slap in the face to Gasparri, he wrote, “Regarding the special interest which you reveal concerning the religion which was previously condemned by the Roman Catholic Church as schismatic and heretic, and which you call Orthodox, I can guarantee you that no clergyman of this religion has suffered on account of his religious convictions.”

This boldfaced lying on the part of the Bolshevik government exemplified the hypocrisy of having a system in which the government supposedly acted differently and in opposition to the beliefs of its governing Party members. The clergymen had been persecuted vigorously since the January 23, 1918 decree, which the Roman Catholic Church knew. In Chicherin’s defense of the state’s actions was a denouncement of Catholic actions involving the falsehood of saintly relics, the immense wealth of the Catholic Church and the poorness of its people, and the Catholic Church’s actions in Poland where Catholic Archbishops were accused of torturing others. What particularly stands out is that this telegram was written less than two weeks after the Eighth Party Congress’ “On Religion” in which they described their anti-religious plan!

This early legislation shows how Lenin vacillated in his view on how to handle religion. This uncertainty had its source in circumstances immediately following the October Revolution. Once in power, the collective Party had several ideas concerning how to best eliminate religion. The “fundamentalists” wanted an unremitting, intense struggle against all religion and were opposed to any and all forms of cooperation between church and state. They focused on fighting religion through atheist propaganda. The “pragmatists,” on the other hand, wanted to pursue political goals instead of focusing on the anti-religious struggle. Relations with religious groups would be based on how much they supported or detracted from Communist domestic and foreign policies. If they proved helpful in state endeavors then they would be rewarded, whereas those who opposed the regime and did not cooperate would receive punishment. The “pragmatists”

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30 Ibid., 52-53.
were eager to use the various religions’ influences at home and abroad to further their own policies.  

Lenin agreed with the pragmatists, for they espoused his own view of subordinating the anti-religious campaign to the interests of class struggle. He was not focused on changing religion through outright struggle, but instead by taking away the utility of religion in the people’s lives. Just because religion was reactionary and false did not mean that the people would immediately see it, especially when they had been manipulated for centuries. The fundamentalist approach had some merit in Lenin’s eyes because he also believed that religion should be fought continually. He did not agree with their excessive use of propaganda. Lenin as the informal Head of State took the pragmatist line, sometimes emphasizing the struggle against religion to ensure its continuation, while the Communist Party undertook the fundamentalist line. His successors would use the state to implement both views at the same time, funding massive propaganda efforts while simultaneously rewarding or punishing religious groups for their usefulness.

**Overt Action Against the Russian Orthodox Church**

The ROC had to change its views toward the state quickly for it to survive. According to Bociurkiw, it did so through a three-step progression:

1) Initial hostility to the Soviet regime, and active or moral support of the anti-Bolshevik forces; (2) withdrawal from political activities into a neutral, apolitical position combined with a *de facto* recognition of the new order, and professions of loyalty to Soviet authority insofar as its orders did not conflict with religious obligations; and (3) *de jure* recognition of the Soviet regime and the church’s commitment to unconditional loyalty to the state and positive support of its policies.

The first step has already been discussed, with the letter from Patriarch Tikhon as a prime example of the Church’s reaction to state repression. The Patriarch actively supported the White Guard in its efforts to fight the Communists in the Russian Civil War that had begun upon the Bolsheviks’ assumption of power. The Red Army initially showed progress in suppressing the rebellion to an extent that the Patriarch realized that he needed to prepare for the survival of the faith in what would be a long-term conflict with the Communists. On September 25, 1919

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31 Bociurkiw, ‘Church-State Relations,’ 82.
32 Bociurkiw, ‘Church-State Relations,’ 84.
Patriarch Tikhon called for the clergy to stop political opposition to the regime which, according to Bociurkiw, allowed the ROC and the clergy to survive the defeat of the White armies. His actions marked the transition toward the second step.

The ROC knew that it would find itself in trouble if it failed to stay out of politics. As Evan E. Young, the American Commissioner to the Baltic States at Riga, noted in a confidential letter to Secretary of State Charles Hughes, the Church was unable to confront the state by force. “In spite of the great influence of the Church, it was obviously impossible, in the existing state of feeling in the country, to attempt to resist the new rulers by force, and thus the only aim of the clergy was to try and preserve their influence over the masses, and to save what remained of their authority until such a time as conditions had changed.” The ROC was initially able to do this because of unforeseen circumstances, mainly a famine that began in 1921. People had no hope and the government, which had just begun implementation of its New Economic Policy, was not able to help the people. A religious revival occurred in all religions as the people tried to find a way to cope with what was occurring. Unfortunately, the government noticed the people’s inclination to trust in their faiths instead of the government.

Even though the state actively restricted and persecuted the clergy it also admonished the local authorities and tried to moderate their actions in anti-religious work. The Tenth Party Congress, which convened in March 1921, stressed Lenin’s view that atheist work should not be pushed too hard as it would only hurt the relationship between the believers and the state. This was largely ignored by the local authorities. It should be stressed the Lenin did not want to distance the believers from the state. He believed that religion was misleading them, not that they should be isolated simply because they fell into religion’s trap. This is why the state focused only on the clergy at first.

The state knew that the Church was no longer a major political problem after the Patriarch’s letter, but now it posed a threat that Lenin had not anticipated; the Church was raising money to help the people. In fact, the Patriarch had issued an appeal for help from the Eastern Patriarchs, the Catholic Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Protestant Episcopal

33 Ibid.
35 Conquest, Religion, 27.
Bishop of New York and had begun collecting money from the Orthodox believers to distribute to those in need.\textsuperscript{36} As a result the people willingly drew toward religion, reaching out for help anywhere they could. A religious revival soon began as the clergy turned people toward belief in God’s provision instead of toward trust in the state. Young understood that the people merely wanted help, noting that “The religious revival now taking place is in no way due to any special ability on the part of the clergy.”\textsuperscript{37} Lenin did not see it this way.

The state initially centralized famine relief efforts under itself, and the ROC was forced to give up all of the money it had collected. As the famine got worse, however, the state realized that it would need religion’s help to raise more money. Young had noticed the state’s predicament months before in his report. “In connection with the famine relief, it became clear that the Church was the only organization outside the Government which had the power and means of assisting, and this was recognized by the Soviet leaders themselves.”\textsuperscript{38} On December 9, 1921 the state began allowing religious organizations to participate in the relief effort. This was the first time that legislation against the Church was ignored for the greater good of the people, an action that would repeat itself on a large scale within two decades.

After several weeks of cooperation in fighting the famine, the state became suspicious of the ROC. Firstly, the government started suspecting the ROC denigrated the state behind its back. This was most noticeable when the Karlovatskii Sobor, a group of émigré clergy and nobles who convened regularly to discuss how to run the ROC outside of Russia proper, met after the Church was allowed to participate in the relief effort. At this meeting it denounced the government for causing the famine in the first place. It did not matter that the Patriarch had not convened the council or known what was said at it, the state still connected it to the Patriarch’s supposed plans to overthrow the government.\textsuperscript{39} Secondly, the Church still had many valuables in its treasury that it had not given up. Patriarch Tikhon issued a statement asking for the churches to give all of their unsanctified valuables to the famine relief, but this was not enough for the state. In order to justify renewed persecution of the Church, the state issued an ultimatum that it knew would push the Church toward revolt. In February of 1922 the state ordered all precious

\textsuperscript{36} John Curtiss, \textit{The Russian Church and the Soviet State} (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), 107.
\textsuperscript{37} Young, \textit{Russian Revolution}, 57.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Curtiss, \textit{The Russian Church}, 109.
metals and stones turned over to it for the famine relief effort, including sanctified valuables. The Patriarch refused and called for believers to defend the consecrated items.

The government wanted the ROC to collapse in the long-term and for the people to support the state instead of the ROC in the short-term. Lenin proposed that harsh measures were enacted for a short period of time in the name of helping the people acquire food. Spinning the Church’s withholding of consecrated valuables as the ROC purposefully withholding an end to the famine would allow Lenin to act against religion on the people’s behalf:

> It is now and only now, when in the territories afflicted by famine people are eaten for food and hundreds if not thousands of corpses are lying in the roads, we can (and therefore we must) carry out the seizure of church valuables with wildest and most merciless energy and not stop short of suppressing any opposition…All the indications are that we will not be able to do this later, since no other factor, apart from desperate starvation, can ensure for us this kind of sentiment on the part of broad masses of the peasantry.

In order the limit the effectiveness of the Church, sermons were censored by the state, religious instruction in churches was banned, and all existing legislation limiting the Church were enforced more rigorously. Furthermore, a new state calendar forced religious holidays to occur on work days so the people could not attend them, the taxes for church lands were raised, and compulsory insurance for church property (predictably with the state as beneficiary) were enacted.

Lenin thought it best that the Patriarch was not touched in the persecution that followed. “I believe that it is expedient for us not to touch Patriarch Tikhon himself, although he undoubtedly stands at the head of this mutiny of slave owners. A secret directive should be given to the State Political Department concerning him, so that all the connections of this leader be observed and revealed with the utmost accuracy and in the greatest possible detail at this very moment.”

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43 Lenin to Molotov, 5.
that the state could potentially manipulate them for its purposes. A whole department called the Cheka, had already been doing just that.

Since the Revolution the Cheka had been targeting individual clergymen in its long-term plan to destroy the ROC, as this 1920 letter from T.P. Samsonov, head of the SD of the Cheka, to Feliks Dzerzhinsky, Chairman of the Cheka, reveals. “The SD of the VChK has recently focused all its attention on its plans for breaking down the church precisely on the mass of clergy, and that only through them can we completely destroy and break up the church, by means of slow, intensive and laborious work.”\(^{44}\) The SD’s technique improved with time as they learned more about the character of individual bishops, playing off of their ambitions and recruiting informers from the lower clergy if it was discovered that they could serve this function. Informers would be backed with financial and material wealth to scare them into submission. “Financial and material subsidies without a doubt will tie them to us and to a new relationship, indeed a relationship where he becomes an eternal slave of the Cheka, fearing the unmasking of his activity.”\(^{45}\)

By 1919 many clergy had been turned, some of these holding prominent positions. These manipulated clergy were called “progressive” clergy by the state, since they saw the benefit in helping the state. In December 1919, M.I. Latsis, a high-ranking member of the Collegium of the All-Russia Cheka, wanted to use these clergy to renovate the ROC from the inside, thereby turning the ROC in favor of the state. P. Krasilov, head of the Justice Commissariat’s Department of Cults, called instead for the destruction of religion to prevent a reunification of church and state. Lenin went with Latsis’ view, deciding to politically support a breakaway group of clergy calling themselves the Living Church.\(^{46}\)

The state helped the Living Church by supporting their decisions (including one to arrest and defrock Patriarch Tikhon in April 1923), endorsing all anti-ROC statements it issued (which included allowing their views to be published when the ROC’s publications had been taken away), and by forcibly turning over ROC buildings for Living Church use.\(^{47}\) In fact, the state had arrested Tikhon in late 1922 for his efforts in preventing the collection of valuables for the

\(^{44}\) Samsonov to Dzerzhinsky, 24.


\(^{46}\) Bociurkiw, “Church-State Relations,” 82-83.

\(^{47}\) Conquest, *Religion*, 16.
famine relief effort, confining him to a monastery until his eventual release. The state’s support should be seen as the most advantageous move to further state goals, since Lenin cared more for the completion of state goals than he did the demise of religion. Once it was no longer advantageous to support the Living Church the state was bound to switch to whatever alternative contributed the most to its political goals. This is why when the Living Church’s popularity fell in the years leading up to its dissolution in 1927, the state began looking to Patriarch Tikhon once again.

The state was quick to shift allegiances with religious leaders because religious support in domestic affairs was seen as paramount to the furthering of domestic policies until such a time that religion died out. Leon Trotsky affirmed the importance of religion in domestic affairs in the subscript of a 1922 letter he wrote to the Politburo:

I repeat again that the editorial board of Pravda [the main state magazine, literally translated as Truth] and Izvestia [Delivered Messages, or simply News, a major state newspaper] do not realize sufficiently the tremendous historical significance of the developments in the church and surrounding it... The puny Genoa rubbish takes up whole pages, while the most profound spiritual revolution in the Russian people (or more precisely, the preparation for this most profound revolution) is assigned to the back pages of the newspapers.48

The Genoa rubbish to which he refers was the Genoa International Conference held from April 10 to May 19 of that year in which more than thirty countries participated, including the USSR. The purpose of the conference was to figure out how to economically rebuild Eastern Europe after WWI, but in this letter Trotsky assigned more importance to religious developments than the rebuilding of Eastern Europe! Lenin wholeheartedly agreed with Trotsky’s sentiment, adding a note to this letter that stated “True! One thousand times true! Down with rubbish!”49

Chicherin recognized the importance of domestic religious developments in international affairs as well. He explained in a letter to Stalin how the execution of Catholic Archbishop Budkiewicz had turned international political figures against the Soviet state, and therefore recommended in advance that Tikhon not be executed for the same reason:


49 Ibid.
All other countries view [Tikhon’s] sentence as nothing other than naked religious persecution... In a word, the pronouncing of a death sentence in the case of Tikhon will worsen much further our international position in all our relations. To pronounce the death sentence and then to change it as if under pressure from the other states is most disadvantageous for us and will create an exceedingly difficult impression. We therefore propose the rejection in advance of the death sentence on Tikhon.  

Regardless of the state’s feelings towards religion, Lenin and Stalin knew that they must abide by international views on religion if only in appearance so that the Soviet state’s international support would not diminish. This is why they reinstated Tikhon after obtaining his “confession.”

Tikhon was allowed by the state to be reinstated as a priest and let out of his house arrest on June 16, 1923 after he had officially “repented” of his “crimes” and had given a public apology speech. The third step of the Church’s political survival plan began upon his release, as Tikhon began seeing the role that religion played in Lenin’s governmental policies. In Lenin’s mind, if the Church could be used to make the believers loyal to the state, which was the progressive approach to church/state relations, then it should be utilized to this end. Since Tikhon already held widespread support from believers across the Soviet Union it made sense that he should be used to advocate on behalf of the state. His release from house arrest lined up with state religious policy because it occurred only after he had admitted that the state had been right about him, and part of religious policy shifted to protect the state’s image. The Patriarch’s restoration signaled a new direction in state religious policy as it moved from the persecution that marked the time of the famine to intense propaganda set forth by the Twelfth Party Congress. This focus on propaganda did not come from Lenin, however.

**Stalin and the Russian Orthodox Church**

Lenin’s successor, Joseph Stalin, emphasized a mixture of the fundamentalist and progressive approaches to religious policy and advocated for intense atheist propaganda. Stalin

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51 Bociurkiw, “Church-State Relations,” 86.

52 Conquest, *Religion*, 16-17.

53 Instead of outlining the main types of propaganda and explaining how each type contributed to some facet of Soviet religious policy, I will content myself in providing two invaluable sources that illustrate Soviet propaganda types better than I could here. David Powell, *Anti-Religious Propaganda in the Soviet Union: a study of mass persuasion* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1975) explains propaganda overall, with specific examples on indirect
had been appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party, which did not have significant responsibilities in 1922; in the two years before Lenin’s death he worked at giving his office increased responsibility and power so that when Lenin died on January 21, 1924, Stalin became the next leader of the Soviet Union. Among his first acts in office was to compile a list establishing who was against the state, a task given to the OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate). In February of 1924 the OGPU reported its findings, classifying them into three main categories: Political Parties, Organizations, and Associations; Collaborators and Officials in the Active Service of Tsarism; and Hidden Enemies of Soviet Power. Number three under the category of Hidden Enemies of Soviet Power was “all servants of religious cults: hierarchs, [Orthodox] priests, [Catholic] priests, rabbis, deacons, church elders, precentors, monks etc.,” showing the state’s continued mistrust of clergy, while number nine in the same category listed “all belonging to religious sects and communities (Baptists are especially in mind).”

When Tikhon gave a speech to the faithful on April 7, 1925 in which he officially recognized the Soviet government and implored believers to obey it, Stalin did not buy it. After Tikhon’s death later that year, Metropolitan Sergei eventually became the Acting Patriarchal locum tenens (deputy) of the ROC, though Stalin prevented the office of Patriarch from existing after Tikhon’s death. Sergei adopted Tikhon’s political survival policy soon after assuming office, reaffirming in a message on July 29, 1927 that he would remain loyal to the laws of the state and keep the ROC politically neutral as Tikhon had. Despite Sergei’s reassurance that relations with the Church would be smooth, Stalin began atheist propaganda efforts anyway and had actually been increasing anti-religious propaganda since assuming the office of General Secretary in 1922.

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55 Ibid. In this article, Bociurkiw cites a date of June 10, 1926 for this message. After further research I discovered that multiple sources date the message declaring allegiance to the Soviet Union as July 29, 1927, which I used here. The message to which Bociurkiw must be referring was actually a draft of the aforementioned letter Sergei submitted to the NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) for approval. He was arrested before he could publicly give the message and so was forced to wait until after he was released from prison on March 27, 1927.
Stalin called for the creation of a Committee to Establish Separation of Church and State in 1922. Until its abolishment in 1929 this commission was secretive in nature and highly regarded, as its membership showed. The chairman was Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, who in 1925 became the chairman of the League of Militant Godless, and the secretary was Yevgeny Tuchkov, the head of the Sixth section of the Secret Department of the GPU (State Political Directorate, which became the OGPU in 1923). Other important members included Petr Krasikov (head of the Eighth department (department on cults) in the People’s Commissariat of Justice) and T. Samsonov (head of the SD of the Cheka). Meetings were held every two weeks to apply state religious policies to a variety of practical problems facing the government, including what to do about Patriarch Tikhon. This commission had a lot of power.  

In fact, much of Soviet state religious policy was determined by this commission in the early stages of Stalin’s rise to power. Its actions clearly highlight the changes to Lenin’s policy views that Stalin decreed after his death. Firstly, this commission decided final actions undertaken in the name of the state concerning religious policy. In its meeting minutes for June 12, 1923 the commission decided to

inform Tikhon that the measure cutting him off can be changed if a) he makes a special statement in which he repents of his crimes committed against Soviet power… b) that he recognizes it as just that he be called to trial for these crimes; c) that he openly and sharply renounces all counter-revolutionary organizations…f) that he expresses his agreement to certain reforms in the church sphere (for example, the new style [new calendar]).

Patriarch Tikhon stated these exact demands in his June 16 speech merely four days after the commission had issued them! The direct say of the commission differed from Lenin’s preferred method of personally approving and changing religious policy decisions, for his religious policy views differed from Stalin’s vision.

Secondly, the commission, whose name ironically states its dedication to the separation of church and state, chose to interfere directly with the Church despite the laws condemning such actions. Its success in continuing policy also shows that Stalin agreed with the direct violations

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of the law carried out by the commission. An example of the commission’s interference is recorded in the meeting minutes of July 17, 1923, the day after Tikhon publicly spoke out against his actions as the commission had demanded. “Instruct comr. Tuchkov to influence Tikhon tactfully so that Tikhon would issue an explanation via the newspapers and interviews with foreign correspondents that he did personally write the appeal and declaration of repentance,” as well as a number of other international affairs-oriented proclamations. The commission’s interference differed from Lenin’s approach to church/state relations in that Lenin would have resolved to not undertake actions against the Church that hurt its foreign relations instead of directly forcing the Church to say and do what he demanded. An example of Lenin’s approach is his directive to not personally touch Tikhon when the 1922 collection of valuables scandal occurred.

Thirdly, the commission chose to directly intervene in the running of the Church, another action against the law. In the meeting notes of July 2, 1924 the commission decided that “it is possible to allow the commemoration of Tikhon in services only if Tikhon agrees to the formula: instead of the words [Patriarch] ‘of all Russia,’ ‘of the whole of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.’” The commission sought to directly regulate the affairs of the Church to further the state’s political goals, in this case pushing the people toward acceptance of the regime. Lenin would not have interfered directly with the Church in this way and would have opted for proving the uselessness of religion to the masses, as much of the early legislation on religion testifies. While this commission began directly persecuting religious policy, other organizations began spreading atheist propaganda.

Among the first to do so was a newspaper called “The Godless” (Bezbozhnik) which had been established in December 1922. This newspaper originally began publication in Moscow but spread outward across the whole Union. In August 1924 a society was formed called “Society of Friends of the Paper Bezbozhnik” whose goal was to disseminate atheist propaganda. This society, which was mainly composed of Party propagandists and agitators, formed a congress the following year that decided to form a League of the Godless. This league would organize atheists to voluntarily distribute atheist pamphlets and anti-religious propaganda and was open in

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acknowledging that its volunteers were also organized under the direction of the Communist Party.\(^{60}\) Since the League emphasized that all atheist propaganda should correlate to the interests of class struggle and support the state’s political and economic policies, its ideology quickly became, as Kolarz states, “a petty, economic materialism devoid of any larger ideological concept and vision.”\(^{61}\)

The majority of Communists did not especially like the League, considering it an eccentric branch of the Party, so those who sought membership in the League tended to possess a vested interest in the spread of atheism. The state officially wanted nothing to do with it because of its misguided zeal.\(^{62}\) Yet, religion had become such a problem within the Party’s own ranks that the Sixteenth Party Congress advised local officials to expel all members who were still practicing religion within the local administration in 1929, leading to a purge through the second half of 1929 and into the first half of 1930.\(^{63}\) This purge coincided with the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan, in which Stalin hoped to achieve considerable progress toward global socialism. After the purge, the League became more prominent. It began publishing several anti-religious journals and magazines which included *Bezbozhenik*, *Antireligioznik* (The Anti-Religious), *Voinstvuyushchiy Atheism* (Militant Atheism), and *Derevensky Bezbozhenik* (The Village Godless).\(^{64}\) The League would eventually be dismantled sometime after the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union during World War II, but until it was it served as an example of Stalin’s religious policy. Stalin did not particularly like the League even though it was successful in mobilizing support for atheist propaganda and faithfully served other functions that will be discussed later. Stalin allowed its continuation for two main reasons: Firstly, the League disseminated atheist propaganda prolifically, which aligned with the fundamentalist interpretation of religious policy Stalin supported. Secondly, the League worked in acquiring voluntary aid in distributing atheist propaganda and in causing Soviet citizens to look to the state for guidance.

\(^{60}\) Conquest, *Religion*, 17.


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 7-8.


\(^{64}\) Conquest, *Religion*, 18.
Unfortunately for believers, Stalin, more than Lenin, vehemently opposed religion in any form. He sought to actively crush religion through the imposition of impossible regulations, like the RSFSR Criminal Codex. On January 1, 1927 the Criminal Codex became legally binding. In its fourth chapter, one year’s corrective labor could be imposed on those who taught religious subjects to students under eighteen in state or private educational institutions or schools, six months could be given for religious organizations acting as though they had juridical rights, and three months could be given for the performance of religious rites in state or social establishments and for placing within these structures any religious images whatsoever.\(^{65}\) Keep in mind that all church buildings were registered and owned by the state by this time, and religious organizations were legally not permitted to own property of any kind. Religious organizations got around legal issues by meeting in each other’s homes, but a later amendment (“On Religious Associations”) would restrict even that by making the use of more than one private dwelling as a prayer house illegal. This 1929 amendment forced believers to pray and conduct services in one location only so they could be easily monitored by the state.\(^{66}\)

On July 29 of that year Sergei made his public declaration of loyalty to the state in which he implicitly denied any religious persecution against the Church. Despite Sergei’s acquiescence to the state, Stalin continued persecuting the Church through outlawing the convening of a sobor for any reason, the election of a new Patriarch, the opening of theological schools, or any other benefits attributed to normalized church/state relations.\(^{67}\) By this year Stalin believed that he had effectively suppressed all overt opposition towards the Communist Party and triumphed over his rivals within the Party. Thusly enabled to consolidate power under himself and build his personal dictatorship, Stalin began a series of attacks in the following years in his pursuit of the formation of a completely atheist state.\(^{68}\) Stalin had begun propaganda activities in 1922 upon receiving the title of General Secretary, and it was not until 1927 that active persecution outside of propaganda had occurred. The year 1929 marked an increase in outright persecution, beginning with an amendment: the April 8 “On Religious Associations.”

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 20-21.


\(^{67}\) Bociurkiw, “Church-State Relations,” 88-89.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 78.
The April 8, 1929 decree made it remarkably hard to form a religious group or to practice beliefs in any way, and even if these groups followed the law completely they were setting themselves up to be monitored constantly. As stated earlier, Article 10, section 3 forced believers to use one private premise as a prayer house, while Article 36 granted the state the power to take away religious buildings at any time for any reason, such as “if the building is indispensable for state or social needs.”69 Article 17 took away all humanitarian abilities of religious groups; prevented children, adolescents, and women from being taught religion; and discontinued all religious literature that was not essential for conducting services.70 These three articles exemplify how the state had thought through every facet of religious expression and life so it could restrict religion entirely. The bulk of this decree focused on what religious organizations could and could not do. Sections of this amendment, however, gave the government even greater power than what it had been able to do earlier.

As Mehrdad Haghayegh explains it, the amendment gave the government greater control over six main abilities over which it already had some say. 1) Religious groups were forced to register with local authorities in order to operate. 2) All charitable, economic, and recreational activities sponsored by religious groups were banned and only those activities necessary to fulfill the spiritual needs of their members were permitted. 3) Basic procedures and requirements for conducting religious affairs was established and regulated by the government. 4) The locations at which religious functions could occur were restricted. 5) Religious institutions were denied juridical personality, meaning that they could not generate revenue among other things. 6) Any religious group breaking the letter of the law could be liquidated by the Soviet government.71

Stalin had already manipulated the religious policies of Lenin so that they were more forceful in condemning religious believers and oriented toward the manipulation of the boundaries for the separation of church and state. Now that he was confident of his own power situation within the government, Stalin had created legal backing for his interference. In 1930, however, he backed off from strictly enforcing religious policy and made minor concessions toward religion, continuing to do so until 1937. His backward steps in his religious policy were due to two main problems. Firstly, religious believers had not backed down to increased

70 Ibid., 65.
persecution and had instead become confirmed that their faiths were correct. Non-believers also complained, some within the Party, about how violent some of Stalin’s anti-religious measures had been, which only added to the opposition. Secondly, Stalin’s agricultural collectivization attempts had begun to fail.

Stalin did not want believers to be confirmed in their faiths, for he wanted to destroy faith altogether. Lenin predictions that active persecution would backfire on the Party had been accurate. While the complaints of religious believers concerning atheism would not cause Stalin to change his campaign, believer opposition combined with general disapproval of his collective agricultural system would. On March 2, 1930 Stalin wrote a Pravda article entitled “Dizzy with Success” in which he denounced the excesses of collectivization. Two weeks later the Central Committee adopted “On the Struggle against Distortions of the Party Line in the Kolkhoz Movement,” in which the Central Committee denounced the local administrative officials who had “distorted” the Party’s anti-religious fervor by taking official actions too far. They were accused of strengthening religious prejudices and ordered to stop closing churches, among other instructions.72

In order to further placate the public, Stalin granted several concessions to believers. Among others, the children of non-working parents (specifically those of priests) were allowed to attend higher education institutions again, the rights of citizenship were restored to priests, atheist publications dropped in circulation significantly in the early 1930s, and anti-Christmas and anti-Easter carnivals stopped occurring in 1935.73 While these concessions marked a step backward in religious policy to Stalin, the activities of the League of the Militant Godless might have given him the confidence that his atheist agenda would not be significantly impacted in the future. The League had grown in prestige and strength significantly since 1922, to the extent that some believed it capable of being a type of counter-church. In 1933 the League had six anti-religious higher education institutions, twenty-six Workers’ Anti-Religious Universities, one Anti-Religious University for Red Army soldiers, and one Anti-Religious Correspondence Institute, all of which gave anti-religious training.74

72 Conquest, Religion, 24.
73 Ibid., 26-27.
74 Kolarz, Religion, 10.
On November 25, 1935 Stalin addressed the Union in a speech, explaining a draft on revisions to the Soviet Constitution to the people. He explained that on February 6, 1935 the Seventh Party Congress had formed a Constitutional Committee. The committee had allowed the people to submit amendments to it that took into account the ways Soviet life had changed from 1924 to 1935 and created a list of amendments based partially on these suggestions. Surprisingly, Stalin turned down two amendments to the Draft Constitution that furthered persecuted religion. One amendment wanted to change Article 124 of the 1924 Constitution to prohibit the performance of religious rites altogether. Stalin pointed out that “this amendment should be rejected as running counter to the spirit of our Constitution.”

The other amendment would have changed Article 135 to restrict ministers of religion to having the right to vote, but not that of being elected. Stalin explained why he did not appreciate this amendment:

I think that this amendment should likewise be rejected. The Soviet government disfranchised the non-working and exploiting elements not for all time, but temporarily, up to a certain period. There was a time when these elements waged open war against the people and actively resisted the Soviet laws. The Soviet law depriving them of the franchise was the Soviet government's reply to this resistance. Quite some time has elapsed since then. During this period we have succeeded in abolishing the exploiting classes, and the Soviet government has become an invincible force. Has not the time arrived for us to revise this law? I think the time has arrived.

Stalin’s explanation made sense but did not line up with his actions. The priests had been disfranchised up until 1930, five years after the ROC under Tikhon had pledged loyalty to the state. Stalin’s decision had nothing to do with Revolutionary actions of the ROC. The last four sentences of his speech reveal the confidence he had in his government. His confidence was so great that an unconstitutional question was included in the 1937 census asking each citizen if they believed in God or were unbelievers, something that was constitutionally the private affair of every citizen. The results of the census were unthinkable bad, so much so that the Party destroyed the entire census, arrested the census officials, and never used a question concerning religion in any census in the future. On top of that, the League was disbanded and Stalin


76 Ibid.

77 Kolarz, Religion, 12.
stepped up religious persecution once again. Increased persecution would occur until World War II a few years later.

Stalin’s actions in the 1930s show how state religious policy was influenced by two major factors. Firstly, it was impacted by the vacillating temperaments and personal goals of the Party leader. Secondly, policy was influenced by the defensive measures employed by the state to protect its image. Instead of enforcing the basis for religious policy when crises arose, which in the case of religion was progressing toward religion’s ultimate extermination, the state chose to treat religion in whatever way allowed for the state’s power and image to remain intact. The state would permit both influences to govern its policy for the rest of the Soviet Union’s existence, as later chapters will prove.

The major differences in policy between Lenin and Stalin are proof that these influences dominated the formation and enforcement of religious policy. Though both leaders claimed to follow communism’s line on religion, they each adhered to differing tactics. Lenin sought to make religion ineffective through replacing it ideologically with communism and taking out the clergy who manipulated the people. Stalin wanted to suffocate religious people, both clergy and laymen alike, until religion died by his hand. The leaders’ personal views on religion created these differing stances. Lenin did not want to upset the sensibilities of believers while Stalin did not care; Lenin wanted the truth of communism to replace the lies of religion while Stalin wanted to scare or overwhelm people into being communist.

Both operated under completely different political situations which impacted how they treated religion. Lenin dealt with counter-revolutionaries and anti-communist dissidents so that he did not do much against religion outside of limiting its capabilities. Stalin gathered power under himself and was able to focus on destroying religion. Lenin did not want to oppress believers beyond despair while still advancing the state’s policy of neutralizing religion; Stalin oppressed believers but wanted to cover it up so his image remained the same. These circumstances impacted the personal goals of each leader, which governed the actions of the state over the ideology of the government.

Lenin and Stalin both handled situations outside of the law and official state stance on religion to protect their power and/or image. Lenin forced the Church to be dependent on the state through renting the equipment and premises necessary to perform its services, which went directly against the laws concerning the separation of church and state as well as the law of
government noninterference in religious affairs. His early legislation declared the freedom of religion, yet also attacked priests for the fact that they were priests. When the Soviet Union was in danger due to famine, Lenin operated outside of the law and allowed the Church to raise money for the famine relief even though it was not allowed to raise money outside of what it needed to perform services. He ultimately did this to save face internationally.

Stalin functioned outside of the law more so than did Lenin, even using government committees to break the law specifically. As the situation between the Committee to Establish the Separation of the Church and State and Patriarch Tikhon shows, this government committee completely disregarded the law so that the image of the government would remain unassailable outside the country. Stalin also made concessions to the Church and other religious organizations when popular opinion was against him, explicitly choosing to ignore the law to gain popularity with the people. He created legislation that outright hindered the freedom of worship when he outlawed the use of religious items inside state-owned buildings, knowing that all buildings were owned by the state. Also, not allowing organizations to meet in more than one location did not allow churches to have adequate space for all of its believers, hindering their ability to worship.

A unified state religious policy did not exist, for the only ideological factor that unified Lenin and Stalin’s policies was that of struggling against religion. Two separate policies were at work before war shook the world for the second time, policies that used the law but did not follow it unless to do so was useful to the state’s goals. Throughout this chapter the ROC has been utilized to represent religious policy, but if there was no prevalent state policy then each leader may have had different policies for different religions. The next chapter uses Islam to prove exactly that.
CHAPTER THREE

CONFUSED POLICY TOWARD ISLAM

The Soviet government may have quickly jumped on the ROC, but it handled the situation with Islam much more cautiously. There were four main reasons that caused this response: Firstly, the role and influence of Islam was not a big enough threat to Soviet power to make it an important issue at the beginning of Soviet rule. Secondly, Islam was more than a religion in Central Asia but a complete way of life, a legal and financial system, and a variety of other institutions all into one. To attack Islam the religion from the beginning would do nothing, since all areas of life had not been replaced with an atheist counterpart. Thirdly, there were few Muslim communists during the Revolution, and the Party held little influence in Muslim areas. Fourthly, to exclude Islam immediately would only distance the Middle East from the state’s revolutionary plans of world domination. While the government eventually confiscated mosque lands, outlawed Sharia courts, and closed madrasas (religious educational institutions), both Lenin and Stalin personally discouraged direct attacks on Islamic institutions and officials. Their caution made early policy towards Islamic Central Asia and other Muslim territories much different than the rest of the USSR.\(^{78}\)

Another reason for Soviet hesitation in acting against Islam was the active participation with which Muslims had engaged in political debate following the February Revolution. The First Congress of Muslims, which met after the February Revolution, met on May 1, 1917. This congress sought to reconcile socialism with Islam while steadfastly standing by the ideals of pan-Islam.\(^{79}\) Alexandre Bennigsen argues that the Muslim Tatars were “pressing ahead with administrative and military arrangements to protect their national interests in the storm which by this time was evidently brewing.” Unfortunately, the resolutions these Muslims had unanimously agreed upon were contrary to the ideals of the Russian Bolsheviks.\(^{80}\)

The Muslim peoples of Russia seemed as excited as most about the February Revolution and willing to cooperate with the new government, even though their initial reaction to news of


\(^{80}\) Ibid., 80.
the Revolution was to attempt to unite themselves into a Muslim nation. On November 24, 1917 Lenin and Stalin wrote a letter entitled “To All Toiling Muslims of Russia and the East,” the result of which made Muslims believe that they were now free to govern themselves. “Your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are declared henceforth free and inviolable. Organize your national life freely and without hindrance. This is your right. Know that your rights… are protected by the entire might of the revolution and its organs… Support this revolution and its Government!”

When Lenin and Stalin wrote this letter asking Muslims for support, they had addressed what they saw as a political or national group. The word Muslim to the early Soviet government meant a person who belonged to the Muslim world in a historical and cultural sense, but who did not necessarily believe in Muhammad’s religion. In this letter, then, Lenin and Stalin were writing to oppressed colonial peoples, not devout followers of Islam. Muslims in the former Tsarist territories believed that the new government was open to complete religious freedom when it wanted the complete opposite. After the government had discovered this error, they still opted to wait before undertaking severe religious persecution; this created a bizarre policy duality in which religious persecution occurred in predominantly Orthodox areas at the same time that legitimate recognition of the Sharia existed in Muslim areas.

**ANTI-RELIGIOUS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

The People’s Commissariat for Muslim Affairs (PCMA) was created on January 19, 1918 for the sole purpose of “bolshevizing” the Muslim population. The PCMA reported to the Commissariat of Nationalities, another indication that the state saw the word Muslim in terms of nationality and culture instead of religion. The first three directors of the PCMA were not Bolsheviks, but were instead popular nationalists. The Party did not force a Communist agenda on it until the summer of 1918. Ultimately, the Party wanted to use the Commissariat of Nationalities to create autonomous Soviet republics for the Muslim peoples as a means of

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82 Conquest, *Religion*, 68.


84 Ibid., 408.

controlling them, though initially the state explained the creation of these republics as freeing the people and dividing up territories along nationality lines. By early 1923 there were ten such republics and eleven oblasts (regions) within the RSFSR. These republics and oblasts were kept separate of each other, for the government did not want the Muslims to unify.

Initially, propaganda was not used to erase Islam in the manner that the state used it against the ROC. When the January 23, 1918 separation of church and state and school decree was applied by local officials in Muslim areas, they went as far as local administrations had in other areas of the Union: mosques were desecrated, mullahs (an expert in and guardian of Islamic theology and Sharia law) were shot, and local officials attempted to secularize the property of religious organizations. This is when the Soviet state learned its first lesson about how to conduct religious policy toward Muslims, for the harsh policy implementation partially resulted in the Basmachi Revolt in which nationalists fought the Bolsheviks well into 1920, especially in Turkestan. The Revolt was a part of the larger Civil War that had begun in May of 1918, and as such was combatted by the Red Army. The Civil War halted Soviet control over the Muslim periphery for another two years. The Soviet religious policy toward Muslims did not progress during this time, for the Soviet needed to fight for the retention of Muslim territories before they could regulate their religion.

Once order had been restored in 1920 under the militarily-superior Communists the state stopped trying to use scare tactics, instead trying to befriend Muslims. In this new Communist tactic, propagandists did not admit to conducting a war on religion, instead claiming to discuss their personal beliefs. Only native Communists were used to disseminate atheist propaganda, and they were to be respectful and display outstanding manners as a form of propaganda in itself. The Soviet state knew that the Muslim nationalists from the Basmachi Revolt were not finished and would eventually rise again; therefore, the PCMA’s goal became to awaken the Muslim

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87 Ibid., 27.
89 Ibid., 92.
90 Eudin, *Soviet Russia*, 27.
masses to political consciousness (in the communist sense of that phrase, which meant convert them to communism) so they could serve the Soviet state.\footnote{Bennigsen, Islam, 88-89.}

During the Civil War the SD of the Cheka had only worked on the ROC, as it was the largest and most powerful religion within Russia. After the end of the Civil War, the SD knew it needed to focus on all religions—especially Islam. “Up till now the VChK has concerned itself only with the destruction of the orthodox church as the largest and most powerful, but this is not enough as there are in the territory of the Republic a whole range of no less powerful Religions, like Islam etc., where we also have to bring the same destruction step by step that was brought to the orthodox church.” Dzerzhinsky, the Chairman of the Cheka, penciled onto this letter a remark that reflected the government’s change in policy. “This is dangerous and we should not undertake it.”\footnote{Samsonov to Dzerzhinsky, 24.}

M. Sultan-Galiev also recognized the failure of overt aggression in an article describing a peaceful approach to propaganda, “Methods for Antireligious Propaganda Among the Muslims.” He stressed the Soviet policy of using Muslims of good report to speak to Muslims personally. “we must have only Communists of Muslim origin carry on antireligious propaganda… 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.”\footnote{M. Sultan-Galiev, “Methods for Antireligious Propaganda Among the Muslims,” in Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert North, eds. Soviet Russia and the East, 1920-1927; a documentary survey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 48.} Sultan Galiev also devised a system with which to classify the receptivity to propaganda of each Muslim peoples of the USSR. In his order, they were the nomadic peoples (Kazakhs, Kirgiz, and Bashkirs), the Volga Tatars, the Crimean Tatars, and then the Turkestanis. The Soviets would know what approaches to use for each peoples group within the Muslim territories.

The Central Asian republics created constitutions in the early 1920s, and the articles concerning religion were much freer in the Muslim-dominated territories than in those with a Christian majority. For example, the 1922 Constitutions for the Bukhara and Khorezm Republics proclaimed in Articles 8 and 9, respectively, absolute religious freedom with the right to observe Muslim ritual, as long as it did not hinder the civic rights of non-Muslim citizens. Anti-religious propaganda was not mentioned in the Central Asian Constitutions, and the clergy/mullahs were
not deprived of any rights like the priests were in the Christian republics. This freedom would be short-lived, however.\textsuperscript{94} Soviet religious policy toward Muslims did not truly start to become as abusive as that for the Christians until 1924, but in the two year period from the creation of these constitutions until then a new evil had sprung up with which the ROC was already dealing: schism.

Just as there was the conservative ROC under Tikhon and the progressive Orthodox Church (the Living Church) that supported the state, there were also conservative and progressive factions within Islam in Central Asia. Both groups invoked the Koran to justify their stances and existed side-by-side at the local level. In the non-Central Asian territories, Islam had main conservative factions in the North Caucasus region, while the progressives were based mainly in Tartaria, Bashkiria, and other Russian Federation territories strongly exposed to communist and European influence. The state hated the conservatives for their influence among the people. The progressives, or New Mosque (Novomechetniki) as the Soviets called them, were received by the state with mixed feelings. These Islamic leaders helped spread Soviet authority and supported it however they could.\textsuperscript{95}

The New Mosque mullahs’ outspokenness toward British imperialism was helpful as well, especially as they urged Muslims outside of Soviet control to repel the British. When land reform occurred in Central Asia in 1925-1926, the New Mosque mullahs were instrumental in getting Muslims to voluntarily hand over their land. The problem for the state was that they did so using religious pretenses, saying that the reforms were compatible with the teachings of Muhammad and that they would be rewarded in the next life. This changed a communist reform into a religious gesture of the people. The New Mosque Muslims transformed all government action to have religious motivation, which caused considerable confusion among communist Muslims who were illiterate.\textsuperscript{96} The state’s indirect propaganda continued alongside New Mosque endeavors, so that by 1924 the Soviets believed they had made some progress, but that was not the case. The Soviets had underestimated the Muslims as the Tsarist government had and

\textsuperscript{94} Bennigsen, Islam, 144.
\textsuperscript{95} Kolarz, Religion, 409.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 410.
realized it only when expectations fell far short of what was expected in terms of atheist education and propaganda’s success.97

The state learned its second lesson about how to conduct its religious policies after this failure, or rather began the process of learning since this problem would persist for years. Religion was engrained into every aspect of Muslim life and could not be liquidated merely by convincing some Muslims that atheism was a viable lifestyle. Bennigsen attributes two main differences between the ROC and Islam involving religion and lifestyle that the Soviets were just beginning to understand at this time. Firstly, Islam made no distinction between temporal and spiritual authority. Instead, everything in life had a sacred aspect to it, exemplified in the New Mosque mullahs using religion to spread communist ideology. The ROC had separate spheres of influence, with the Church itself over temporal authority in importance. Secondly, the Islamic concept of umma, or community, negated the idea of class-consciousness entirely. Communist revolutionary struggle seems irrelevant when compared to umma, and explains why Muslims saw Islam and communism as similar in ideology. Instead of seeking to understand communist thought on religion, they could not understand religion ceasing to exist in their own lives and instead chose to believe that communism and Islam were essentially the same. This was very different from the ROC in that it had recognized classes of people, including the poor, the wealthy, and the priesthood.98

Another lesson the Soviets had not yet learned was the Islam is not nearly as dependent on regular worship led by trained clergy like Christianity. The confession of faith is done nonverbally, making it easier to escape notice.99 There is a whole ideal in Islam called taqiyeh (dissimulation) in which believers are called to hide the outward appearances of their faith to escape religious persecution; while it is a predominantly Shi’ite belief, Sunnis have been known to utilize it in times of trouble. Soviet officials would find it remarkably hard to root out a religion that can easily be concealed and even calls for concealment when under persecution. There were also remote villages that the Communists kept finding who had never heard of communism. It seems like their goal to destroy religion was self-defeating, especially

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98 Bennigsen, Islam, 138-139.
considering that throughout the existence of the USSR there were a higher number of believers in Central Asia than in any other area. The Soviets had not learned this lesson, though, for they attempted the same anti-clergy campaign against the Muslim *mullahs* that they had used a few years earlier against the ROC.

From 1924 until 1928 the state undertook a campaign to denigrate *mullahs*, accusing them of ignorance, bribery, corruption, theft, and immorality. This push was the same idea as the anti-clergy attacks on the ROC yet also inherently different, for these charges were the same kind that the SD had sought to instill in the Orthodox clergy secretly. The difference lay in the openness used against the *mullahs* instead of the secrecy of ROC accusations. They started attacking the institutions that were headed by *mullahs* through the introduction of secular replacements for key institutions, especially the court and educational systems.

The Soviet government saw the Sharia court as being backward, a vestige of Central Asia’s feudal past that impeded the Soviet legal system and created a division in authority over the Central Asian republics. The state withdrew all funding from the courts, which significantly hindered their ability to remain open. Legislation like the October 16, 1924 RSFSR Criminal Code overthrew the courts’ purpose, for it made the bride price, polygamy, and the levirate, among other practices, illegal so the courts were not able to rule on those matters anymore. The state also withdrew the courts’ legal status. The Sharia courts were liquidated in 1926 when the responsibilities of registering births, deaths, and marriage were transferred to the state.

The state wanted to get rid of religious schools more than they did the Sharia courts, for with the teaching of religion comes the survival of religion. The January 23, 1918 separation of church and state and school decree shut down the *waqfs*, or religious endowments. Yet in practice they stayed alive, for people still contributed to the *madrasas*. The problem was the state could not close the schools unless there was an appropriate secular alternative. Soviet rival schools began opening in 1920. Initially they seemed to make great headway, for in Turkestan alone (the republic least susceptible to propaganda according to Sultan-Galiev’s study) there

100 Ibid., 189.
103 Conquest, *Religion*, 70.
were 1,117 schools with 89,970 students by November 1921. The state experienced difficulty in keeping these schools running, however, as the significant decrease in their numbers signifies. By September 1923 the number of schools in Turkestan had dropped to 678 and the number of student to 31,000. The *waqfs* had to be reinstated so education could continue, but the strict control of Soviet officials showed that this compromise would be temporary. By 1928 all *madrasas* had closed and religious education was relegated to private or illegal institutions.105

The mosques were re-appropriated and clergy continued to be persecuted as was occurring with the Christians well into 1928 with the full force of persecution beginning in 1929, but one difference showed the Soviet government that it needed to change its tactics: there were more *mullahs* and mosques per person than there were Orthodox priests and churches.106 The Uzbek Penal Code, a separate code from the RSFSR Criminal Code, had an article that was created specifically to fight Islam. Article 156 proclaimed that “Exploitation of religious prejudices of the masses with the aim of overthrowing the Workers’ and Peasants’ government or of provoking resistance against its law and decrees” was punishable by a three year prison sentence, and even up to death by firing squad.107 Atheist lecturers had been traversing Central Asia since the Revolution, but when the Uzbeks encountered them for the first time they were especially angry over the concept of communism eradicating religion. They asked for a form of Communism that was compatible with religion, a request the lecturers could not fulfill. When Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, the Chairman of the League of the Militant Godless and head of the Central Committee’s Anti-Religious Committee, heard about the Muslims’ request in 1927, he exclaimed that a time had come to completely break the Muslims away from religion.108

From 1927 onward the Soviet drive against Islam became increasingly amplified and direct. This harsher offensive against Islam was uniform, regardless of the differences that existed from place to place. As Bennigsen describes it, “The onslaught on religion was from now on massive, violent, all of a piece—and often clumsy: uniform no matter what the circumstances or the region, and irrespective of whether the populations involved were barely islamicised like the nomads or, like the city folk of Turkestan and the highlanders of Dagestan, closely wedded to

their beliefs." The Soviets decided to begin this new assault around the issue of women’s rights, or the *hudjum*. 

**The Hudjum and the Push to Destroy Islam**

The *hudjum*, or struggle for the emancipation of women, started a major state offensive against Islam. Women’s rights were chosen as the beginning point because it could arguably be a fight against the subjugation of women while Islamic leaders would obviously view the issue solely from a religious standpoint. The main strategy of the state was to view issues that Islam firmly detested, such as unveiling and divorce, with indifference. Even a small act, like making divorce as easy for women to instigate as it was for men when the Qur’an only gave men that ability, could provoke a dispute between clergy and state. On March 8, 1927 “International Women’s Day,” an event marked by hundreds of thousands of women burning their veils, officially marked the beginning of the *hudjum*. It did not last long, however.

The majority of women who participated returned to wearing the veil the next day, for unveiling was equated with prostitution in public Islamic opinion. In Uzbekistan alone around 100,000 women attended the celebration, but the next day all but 5,000 of them had returned to wearing the veil. The remaining 5,000 were continually threatened by men, and as a result fourteen Uzbek women were killed and many more were attacked in a variety of manners, including rape. The Soviet government wanted it to occur again the following year, and so it did. In Uzbekistan, the registered anti-feminist murders exceeded 200 and 45 death sentences were issued relating to attacks on women. An unveiled woman could not walk in public without being beaten.

The state benefited from these deaths because it could justify its attacks against Muslim opposition. It also backfired, however, in that the majority of Muslim Communists refused to unveil their own female relatives when so ordered. The Soviet government’s actions were risky, given that aggression had failed when applied against Muslims in the recent past. Keep in mind that the state had launched a similarly aggressive attack on the ROC at the same time,

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111 Ibid., 417.
112 Ibid., 418.
113 Ibid., 419.
pursuing Christians from the Party and passing the decree “On Religious Associations.” The
passing of this decree in 1929 marked the turning point, as for the ROC, when oblique attacks on
Muslims became direct attacks.

“As with most other related legislation,” Haghayegh states in his book about Islam under
communism, “this law was chiefly designed to paralyze the Russian Orthodox Church, but it did
have serious ramifications for Central Asia, as it further empowered the Soviet authorities to
move against Islam as well.”114 At the same time that the Party purged its Christian members, a
similar purge occurred with Party Muslims. As noted earlier, the Party had allowed nationalists
to run committees like the PCMA and work in politics, but this came to an end with the purge.
Stalin accused the shortcomings of anti-religious propaganda’s incompetence to these nationalist
Communists, whom he accused of acting leniently toward Muslims and Islam. Communists like
M. Sultan-Galiev and Akmal Ikramov, an important nationalist within the Communist Party of
Uzbekistan, were arrested in this purge.115

The official views of the state concerning Islam were summarized in the writings of
Liutsian Klimovich. “It is from Lutsyan Klimovich’s numerous articles in the Soviet press,”
Kolarz explains, “that we get a fairly up-to-date and authoritative Soviet view of Islam.”116
Klimovich was a prolific writer for the state who focused on propagating a negative depiction of
Islam. His writing served the dual purpose of informing the non-Muslim Soviet population of the
official view of Islam and to reinforce atheist propaganda occurring in Muslim territories. In
1928 he published what N. A. Smirnov called the “first attempt to expound the Koran with a
revelation of its internal contradictions,” a commentary of sorts for believers and unbelievers
alike.117 His Socialist Construction in the East and Religion outlined the general strategy for the
furthering of communism, of creating cultural revolution, and implementing anti-religious
propaganda in the Soviet Muslim Republics for Soviet citizens, while his book Islam in Tsarist
Russia came out in 1937 to explain Islam’s place in Russian history.118 Klimovich also gave a

115 Ibid., 24-25.
116 Kolarz, Islam, 405.
117 N. A. Smirnov, Ocherki Istoriya Izucheniya Islama v SSSR (Outlines of the History of the Study of Islam in
the USSR) (Moscow: Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, 1954), qtd. in Robert Conquest,
118 Conquest, Religion, 72.
speech on the subject of whether Muhammad even existed, describing him as an “imaginary figure.” His speech apparently “provided the impetus for further researches in this field.”\footnote{Smirnov, \textit{SSSR}, 72.} He also wrote several other books and articles that denigrated subjects like the \textit{hajj} (pilgrimage), the \textit{uraza} (fasting), and the feast of \textit{Kurban Bairam}.\footnote{Conquest, \textit{Religion}, 72.}

A letter from the Karakul Mutual Credit Association to Fatih Suliemanov of Tashkent on April 5, 1928 asked for a replacement imam for a Tatar \textit{mahalla}, or country subdivision, in Karakul. The qualifications they wanted their new imam to possess show the extent and type of propaganda and anti-religious efforts employed in Central Asia. Firstly, they asked that he know science, economics, and politics; secondly, they asked that he know Islam, but also was familiar with the basics of other religions and had a deep knowledge of European philosophical scholars.\footnote{Karakul Mutual Credit Association to Fatih Suleimanov, April 5, 1929, Seventeen Moments in Soviet History, \url{www.soviethistory.org} (Accessed January 30, 2012).} If their imam had this knowledge he could combat the manipulation of legal and economic ideas by the authorities utilized to take action against the local Muslim populace, as well as be able to offer counter-arguments. Thirdly, they asked that he spoke with eloquence and was attractive to listeners, possibly so that those leaving the faith might be persuaded to stay, a fact supported by the last line in the letter which defined the present as a time when “our people are moving away from [Islam].”\footnote{Ibid.}

Fourthly, they asked that he “possess the ability to prove scientifically that Islam is the supreme religion, and with intelligent proofs repudiate the rejection of religion.” Fifthly, they asked that he “be able to detach Islam from all superstitions and scholasticism, and prove that our religion is a living religion, organized in agreement with the demands of the time; besides this he must have the strength to promote movement of the people along the aforementioned path.”\footnote{Ibid.} Both of these requests are undoubtedly to combat the scientific atheism of state officials and to prove why believers should continue to believe. Sixthly, they asked that he “be an exemplary mentor of the people, i.e., he must follow the path which he teaches. He must not intervene in various squabbles and groupings of people, and must possess the exterior ability to
look upon all people equally.”124 This request is evidently concerning the Soviet tactic of accusing clergy of immorality, among other charges. At the end of the letter they conclude by specifically requiring a defense against propaganda. “To sum up, he must have a positive character and eloquence that brings fruit (his speech must not be boring for the public, in order for the public to ascribe respect to his words). If his speech does not possess the aforementioned qualities, then it will not be possible to preserve the purity of our religion from the ruin of our people’s persuasion and from the dissemination of unbelief.”125

While the Karakul letter makes it seem that the Soviet state was successful in spreading atheist propaganda and was unrelentingly breaking down the religion of the peoples of Central Asia, they had several weak points in their policies that they had not entirely thought through as well. One such weakness was the forced transfer of the different Central Asian languages from Arabic alphabet to the Cyrillic alphabet. The state hoped to dissociate Arabic, as the language of Islam, from culture through replacing the alphabet.126 The natural next step was making Russian the lingua franca of the Union. This move, intended to “Sovietize” the Muslims of Central Asia, actually helped them communicate with each other with greater ease than previously. In trying to destroy the religion that had bound Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds together; the state had introduced a different medium to tie them together instead.127 Another weakness was when the state temporarily allied with the Jadid Movement.

The jadids (Muslim modernist reformers) wanted to reform Islam through a revolutionary movement. Originally the Jadid Movement sought to purify Islam of reactionary clergy in the years leading up to the October Revolution. They wanted to modernize Islam of its obscurantism and archaic doctrines like the low status of women. Since these ideals lined up with the Soviet’s goals after they had gained power, the Soviets teamed up with the jadids. The Soviets and jadids quickly learned what a mistake that was. “When, however, the Jadids realized that the Soviets aimed at the complete destruction of religion, and the Soviets for their part awoke to the fact that the Jadids were interested in nationalism rather than the class warfare,” Geoffrey Wheeler

124 Ibid.
125 Ibid. Parentheses were already included.
explains, “a complete rupture became inevitable, and by 1930 all the Jadid reformers and men of letters had disappeared, many of them having been executed as counter-revolutionaries.”

From 1930 until 1937 no significant legislation or policy shifts occurred toward Central Asia, as also occurred with the ROC. As opposed to the ROC, however, there does not appear to have been many, if any, concessions to Islam. This is partially because the government continually faced failure at rooting out Islam in Central Asia. Also, the Party sought to establish a policy that was set in stone concerning Islam. “A concomitant development of the 1930s was the effort to establish a recognized party ‘line’ on Islam, beyond a general condemnation of it as reactionary.” After the 1937 census another Party purge occurred in which many Communist officials were killed. An official could be targeted in one of two main ways: firstly, if an official did not carry out his duties well enough. This same excuse had been used by Stalin in the 1928 purge, for religion’s continued survival caused him to believe that officials secretly practiced Islam and overlooked others who did so as well. Secondly, an official could be targeted for implementing religious propaganda so well that it hindered the government’s efforts within the Muslim population.

Up until World War II the government discovered that the hudjum had done virtually nothing and that their other anti-religious propaganda techniques were not stopping Islam from growing. No matter what successes the state had on a smaller scale, the government continued to find that Islam was still strong. “From the remoter parts of Moslem Russia there came strange tales about the strength of religious fanaticism which illustrated the complete helplessness of anti-religious propaganda and communist indoctrination efforts,” says Kolarz about the efficacy of propaganda. He tells a story about a group of Ismailite Muslims in the Pamir mountains who believed that “Aga Khan, their leader, had appeared and given them various instructions.” Hundreds of holy places, mosques, and shrines existed in this area about which the government had never known.

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128 Ibid., 191.
130 Kolarz, Religion, 421.
131 Ibid., 423.
This incident with the Ismailite Muslims highlights why Soviet religious policy toward Islam had been both successful and unsuccessful. The Soviets were able to retain control in the major cities to a certain extent, and the predominantly Muslim areas closer to Russia proper were close enough to keep an eye on. The farther Central Asian republics, however, posed a problem for the state in that it could not maintain firm control over religious activities there. Minor progress had been made in atheist propaganda only because of the overwhelming amount of it in circulation and the directness of the personal presentation tactic employed through the 1920s and 1930s. The overarching policy of, as Ludmila Polonskaya words it, “forced introduction of atheism and suppression of freethinking” did not work because the state failed to take into account how Islam affected the lives of Muslims, especially in the less-Russified areas in Central Asia. The number of those who enrolled in atheist organizations like the League of Militant Godless seemed to grow exponentially, only to drop dramatically a few years later in a frustrating cycle of highs and lows in atheist support because Islam was not about joining a club. Attempts to undermine Islamic practices, like the hajj and waqf, proved to be entirely ineffective at stopping the practice of Islam because Islam was a state of the heart. It seemed as though Islam’s survival did not depend on any one aspect of its practice, and the underground movement was so effective that even into World War II the state did not know how many illegal mosques or clergy there were.\footnote{Ibid., 424.}

The state’s handling of Islam in its Muslim republics showed that the state had a different policy for it than for the ROC out of necessity. This was to be expected, as these religions were dissimilar in many of their practices and beliefs. Why, then, would the state treat both religions the same at different points in this pre-World War II period? The state carried out the same enforcement of the January 23, 1918 and April 8, 1923 decrees until the responses of each religion proved that these decrees could not be uniformly undertaken. Yet even after this initial policy divergence the state still tried to carry out the same denigration of the clergy, albeit openly instead of the secret approach taken toward the ROC, and attempted to transfer the secular responsibilities of Islam, such as the Sharia courts and education system, to the Soviet state like it had with the ROC. Party purges occurred twice (in 1924 and 1937) for both religions, and both experienced a moderately lax enforcement of policy between 1930 and 1937.
The answer lays in the double standard of individual leaders’ goals and official state goals that had begun with Lenin. Lenin cared more for power than atheist dissemination. When the state passed the initial “Separation of Church from the State and the School” decree Lenin needed to show the power of the new government through enforcing the decree universally. With the outbreak of the Civil War and the Basmachi Revolt after 1917, Lenin struggled for the survival of the new government and could not enforce policy. Once all opposition had died down to a manageable level he passed the next reform: the April 8, 1923 decree. Thinking that the combined confusion of the Civil War and Basmachi Revolt is what had deterred him in enforcing policy, he tried to push this decree universally as well.

Stalin believed that propaganda and force would be the solution to Lenin’s failure with liquidating religion, and so in 1924 he began his tenure with a purge of the religious from the Party. For four years he tried to persecute religion, gathering more momentum when his First Five-Year Plan began in 1928. As other political moves failed to provide the results that he desired, he cut back on religious policy in 1930 and consistently fought religion at a reduced level until the 1937 census showed that religion had remained strong. Stalin amped up his religious persecution to show his government’s power, fully intending to destroy religion despite the supposed freedoms religion had in the RSFSR 1936 Constitution. When Hitler went against the nonaggression pact he had signed with Stalin, however, Stalin realized that he needed to rethink his stance on religion, regardless of what official ideology stated.
CHAPTER FOUR

WORLD WAR II AND THE CESSATION OF POLICY

Stalin fully intended to increase his anti-religious activities until religion was destroyed once and for all, but political circumstances forced him to put religious persecution on pause. After the signing of the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union on August 23, 1939 and the German invasion of Poland in September 1, Stalin decided to annex parts of Poland by invading it on September 17. After plans for the division of Poland had been settled between Hitler and Stalin in a meeting at Brest-Litovsk, Stalin began the process of incorporating parts of Poland into the USSR. Stalin recognized that he was facing another ten-year struggle with religion if he did not use the help of clergy, especially within the Orthodox Church. Stalin asked Metropolitan Sergei to assist in the reorientation of the Polish religious organizations, a request, David Powell argues, that saved the Church from destruction.\textsuperscript{133}

This new cessation in hostilities against religion marked the third time that the state directly persecuted religion and it had failed. The first attempted policy implementation started in 1917 with the October Revolution and ended in 1923 with the release of Tikhon from prison. The second attempt began in 1927 with the passage of the RSFSR Criminal Code and ended in 1930 with Stalin’s concessions to religion, including the partial restoration of the clergy. The third attempt had begun in 1937 after the census and ended during the acquisition of territories from Poland in 1939. This last attempt was supposed to be temporary, but Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 forced the Party’s agenda on religion out of Stalin’s mind.

\textbf{The Church to the Rescue}

The Church responded to the Nazi invasion of its homeland immediately. The Metropolitan Sergei sent out a message to the believers in the Union the day the Nazis invaded. “Our Orthodox Church has always shared the fate of the people. It has always borne their trials and cherished their successes. It will not desert the people now… The Church of Christ blesses all the Orthodox defending the sacred frontiers of our Motherland. The Lord will grant us

\textsuperscript{133} Powell, \textit{Anti-Religious}, 32.
The Church began collecting money to purchase arms, buy supplies for the wounded, and aid widows and orphans, as did other religions. Metropolitan Sergei held a prayer service on June 26 for the troops and called on all to defend the Motherland. “Fighting for their lives, the Soviet leaders could not refuse such support. Anti-religious propaganda stopped.” Considerations other than a show of support reinforced Stalin’s acceptance of the Church’s help, however.

Powell argues that the ROC was not a threat to Soviet power as it had been in the first years after the October Revolution. The Church had pledged to support the state in 1927, and now it was proving that support with its actions. Stalin also was anxious to make a good impression on Western public opinion, which did not approve of the Soviet Union’s religious policies. The betrayal of Hitler certainly played its part in causing Stalin to care more about Western opinion of his regime. “Most important, Stalin realized that a more liberal policy toward the church would help mobilize popular support within the Soviet Union, both in German-occupied and Soviet-held areas.” A religious revival had already broken out in German-controlled areas, for the Germans allowed the reopening of many churches that had been closed. Priests in these areas, such as the Dno district near Novgorod, began praying for the success of the German army so that religion could once again be free. The Germans recognized this as a viable tactic and used it to gain favor with locals. The state recognized that if it were to strictly enforce anti-religious policies during the war it would result in a loss of popular support.

For two years after the Nazi invasion the state and Church went back and forth in gradually bettering relations. When the Church donated 1,500,000 rubles toward the Red Army Fund on February 23, 1942, the state lifted bans on curfew for Easter. When the state allowed a cleric to obtain a state post on the Extraordinary State Commission to investigate German atrocities in November 1942, the first state appointment held by a cleric since the Revolution, the Church began a campaign for donations to go toward a tank column in January 1943, an act

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134 Ivan Stragorodsky (Metropolitan Sergei), Pravda o Religii, qtd. in Robert Conquest, Religion in the USSR (New York: Praeger, 1968), 34.

135 Powell, Anti-Religious, 32.

136 Conquest, Religious, 34.

137 Powell, Anti-Religious, 32.

made possible because of the permission granted it by Stalin to open a bank account and handle funds donated to the armed forces. The Communist Party in Kuibyshev began complaining to the Central Committee that religion was being tolerated during the war even though the official stance was that religion was false. In defense of their generosity toward religion the state responded that “experience had shown that a man who had religious faith was likely to be a better soldier.” The most significant act of generosity occurred on September 4, 1943 when Stalin met with Metropolitans Sergei, Aleksi, and Nikolai to talk out concessions. The major demand made of the Metropolitans was the calling of a sobor to elect a Patriarch, a request that Stalin granted. Metropolitan Sergei became Patriarch four days later, though he died after only a few months on May 15, 1944. Metropolitan Aleksi became the new Patriarch in February 1945 and used the state’s relaxed views at the end of the war to his advantage, spreading the influence of the Church internationally while the state continued to give the Church concessions.

The majority of concessions that Stalin made were not new at all; they tended to be a less biased, lenient interpretation of the existing legislation on religion. The Church was simply allowed to make full use of the limited rights that it had. The authorities leased out places of worship to congregations, churches were allowed to hold services once again, theological schools reopened, and religious publications like the Journal of the Patriarch resumed. One concession was reported to exist, though it was never published, called the 1945 Decree of the Sovnarkom. This decree overturned Article 12 of the January 23, 1918 decree, which denied the rights of a juridical person to religious organizations. They were once again allowed to own property (except for monastic buildings, which were still state-owned) including their own liturgical items. A 1945 sobor approved a new Polozhenie (Statute) that implied the existence of this unpublished decree. The fact that a sobor was able to approve legislation for itself is proof that the statute existed, for only an internally-governed hierarchical body can legally make statutes to govern itself. All of these concessions contributed to a religious revival that took place in all religions, but especially within the ROC.

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139 House, Millennium, 73-74.
140 House, Millennium, 70.
141 Conquest, Religion, 35.
142 Bociurkiw, “Church-State Relations,” 91-92.
Since there is no indication that the concessions were made into law, religious organizations still operated with the threat over their heads that the state could switch back to a stricter interpretation of law at any time. In order to regulate religious organizational activity better, and to keep informed in case a return to the former status quo was necessary, a council was created to replace the NKVD. This council, called the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC), was created in September 1943 with G. Karpov at its head. The purpose of the council was to mediate between the government and the ROC and supervise its activities. A similar council called the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) was created in May 1944 for all of the other religions, and its purpose was the same as CAROC’s.  

According to John B. Anderson, Karpov appears to have taken his role as mediator between the Church and state extremely seriously. He wanted to ensure that the state received the rights to which it was entitled, but at the same time held a firm belief that the state could have control over the ROC. At a 1945 ROC sobor, Karpov explained the role of the council:

The Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church created by government decision and attached to the USSR Council of Ministers forms a link between the Government and the Patriarch of Moscow and all the Russias for questions requiring government permission. Without in any way interfering in the internal life of the Church, the Council promotes the normalization of relations between Church and State, by ensuring the timely and proper application of the laws and decrees affecting the Russian Orthodox Church. The correct mutual relations established between church and state will undoubtedly lead to an organizational strengthening of the Church and the Council will in future take all necessary steps to remove obstacles which may hinder the Soviet citizen in the exercise of the freedom of conscience granted by the Constitution.

The CARC was less restrictive against the religions it monitored than the CAROC was toward the ROC. The CAROC was stricter because of the threat that the ROC posed to state power as


the religious revival continued, but also because the ROC was the hardest religion to neutralize in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{147}

Once Allied victory seemed certain the anti-religious publications (\textit{Bezbozhnik}, \textit{Antireligioznik}, etc.) and activities (atheist lectures, films, posters, literature, radio programs, etc.) of the state recommenced. The Central Committee issued a 1944 decree called “On the Organisation of Scientific Educational Propaganda” which ordered that all propaganda be based on materialism and science. In 1945 the Central Committee called for all communists to reveal the superstitions of religion and spread the enlightening work of science.\textsuperscript{148} The League of Militant Godless remained dissolved after the war, but a newer organization with an emphasis in this scientific line called the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, or \textit{Znanie} (Knowledge) for short, took over in leading all anti-religious activities in 1947.\textsuperscript{149} In 1948 \textit{Pravda} declared that the Party was not neutral toward religion. “The insufficiently aggressive character of scientific propaganda is manifested from time to time in the failure to emphasize the struggle against religious prejudices… Freedom of conscience… certainly does not signify that our political and scientific organizations are neutral in their attitude towards religion.” An intensification of anti-religious activities followed this announcement, and Party officials published articles to dispel all confusion concerning their stance toward religion.\textsuperscript{150}

Every aspect of Stalin’s religious policy toward the ROC during World War II makes sense with the concerns pressed upon him. As he found himself caught off-guard by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, he needed all of the help he could get. The Church was showing its support of the state through its actions and did so despite possible state repercussions. As has already been discussed, the state’s main concern was the protection of its power and image before the execution of its religious policy. The Nazi’s threatened state power more so than the ROC, and a relaxation of religious persecution would help gain international support in a world that already did not like Soviet religious policies. Giving the Church concessions bolstered their confidence in being open in their activities and gave them motivation to continue to do what it

\textsuperscript{147} Anderson, \textit{Religion}, 27.
\textsuperscript{148} Conquest, \textit{Religion}, 40.
\textsuperscript{149} Haghayegh, \textit{Islam}, 28.
\textsuperscript{150} Conquest, \textit{Religion}, 40-41.
could in supporting the state. Stalin’s decision was necessary for the preservation of Soviet power and influence.

When this threat to the state had lost its power near the war’s end Stalin once again focused on his main concerns. With an Allied victory imminent the government’s international image was not endangered by a renewal of religious persecution, especially with the victories the Soviets were having in Germany. The Church was growing with each day; Stalin needed to quickly increase persecution and establish the state’s official ideology once more. At the same time, however, religious leaders like Patriarchs Sergei and Aleksi were continuing to fight on behalf of the state internationally, even after the war. It was in Stalin’s best interests to tote the Party line, yet not too harshly lest the Church turned against the state using its newfound international connections. Stalin was almost trapped into partially humoring the Church so that it did not turn on him publicly and partially humoring his government’s religious views by enforcing legislation, albeit with reduced hostility. Stalin’s wartime policy with Islam was much different than that of the ROC, however, though with a few similarities.

**Soviet Islam Policy Contradictions**

Up until the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union the state’s policy toward Islam was increasingly harsh as it was for other religions after 1937. Unlike the ROC, however, Islam did not play a huge role in helping the annexed areas of Poland acclimate to Soviet life, as there were not many Muslims in Poland. The Muslims endured two years of repressive policy longer than the ROC as a result, with no real changes occurring until 1941. Muslim leaders did not stir the faithful to defend the Soviet Union immediately as Metropolitan Sergei had done with the ROC for a few reasons. Firstly, as Kolarz explains, “the Russian Church is naturally inclined to take up a patriotic attitude towards any Russian state even if it is communist and atheist.” The ROC was composed mainly of ethnic-Russians, so it would make sense that it responded the quickest to national threat.

The Central Religious Board in Ufa, the governing body of Soviet Islam, eventually called Soviet Muslims on July 18, 1941 to “rise up in defense of their native land, to pray in the mosques for the victory of the Red Army and to give their blessing to their sons, fighting for a

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just cause.” On August 7, 1941, Soviet Islamic leaders appealed to Muslims all over the world. “Declaring that the Islamic peoples of the Soviet Union ‘have risen as one man to resist the German fascist invaders,’ they warned that ‘Islamic civilization… all the world over is today menaced with destruction by the German fascist bands unless the Moslems of the world stand up to it and fight!’”152 Abdul Rahman Rasulayev, Chief of the Central Council of Islamic Religious Centers in the USSR before the war, was an important Islamic figure whom the state used to propagate its ideas. Soviet foreign propaganda built Rasulayev up as an important Muslim personality, especially since he acted as the official spokesperson of Soviet Muslims.153

The state used Rasulayev to broadcast pro-Soviet and anti-Nazi messages, especially to the Middle East. The state used the war as an opportunity to carry out long-term goals of the triumph of socialism, establishing diplomatic relations with Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and a number of other Muslim countries.154 Winning the hearts and minds of the Muslims of the Middle East was a major goal of the state during the war, though the state actively used the export of Soviet Islam after the war. In 1941 the government developed four Spiritual Directorates according to territory: the Directorate for the Sunni Muslims of European Russia and Siberia, the Directorate for the Sunni Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the Directorate for the Sunni Muslims of the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan, and the Directorate for the Sunni and Shi’i Muslims of Transcaucasia. Each of these directorates controlled a prescribed number of Muslim areas, each with its own official headquarters and language.

“The exact role of the Spiritual Directorates is difficult to describe,” Bennigsen admits. “…In fact, very little is known about the official status of Islam, since Soviet sources are extremely reticent on the subject.”155 Since the directorates were extensions of the CARC, they might have simply assisted the government with controlling and regulating religion. Stalin reversed Article 12 of the January 23, 1918 decree in January 1946, an action of little significance to the Muslim clergy since the directorates were governed by the state. While the reversal did result in a revitalization of certain religious activities, like selling religious items and acquisition of buildings in which to meet, it also gave more power to the directorates to control

153 Kolarz, Religion, 426-427.
154 Ibid., 128-129.
155 Bennigsen, Islam, 171-172.
the activities of Muslims.\textsuperscript{156} The directorates and the Soviet Islamic officials like Rasulayev whom the state used to broadcast messages conveyed three main ideas to the non-Soviet Middle East: freedom of religion in the Soviet Union, that Soviet Muslims were wealthy and provided with cultural amenities of every kind, and that the Soviet Union was a bulwark of peace that non-Soviet Muslims should support.\textsuperscript{157}

Islamic leaders rose to the task and faithfully supported the state during and after the war. For this support, the government allowed several important concessions as it had for the ROC. The state allowed a number of conferences for the heads of the different regional heads of the Soviet Islam to discuss important changes to ecclesiastical organization. These conferences were held in Ufa in May 1942, Tashkent in October 1943, and Baku in May 1944 to allow the leaders of different directorates to meet. Near the end of the war and immediately after it a number of mosques were allowed to reopen, and by 1945 the \textit{hajj} was approved for a small group of people each year, though the government found excuses for not allowing it, like inability to secure visas in 1946 and a cholera epidemic in 1947.\textsuperscript{158} “Since 1948 the position of Soviet Islam has been similar to that of the Russian Orthodox Church,” Conquest explains. “On the one hand the Soviet Communist Party has sought to eradicate this faith in campaigns of varying intensity. On the other hand the Muslim leaders have judged it expedient to give full support to Soviet policies as the price for the continued existence of their institutions.”\textsuperscript{159}

After the war the state continued to give concessions to Muslims. The Spiritual Directorates and Muslim clergy were not attacked in the press, and if articles mentioned the clergy in any way it was sympathetically.\textsuperscript{160} The state also willingly allowed “illegal” \textit{mullahs} to preach and pray in their homes. In remote areas Islam was practiced faithfully and openly once again. Some Party officials also practiced Islam, though they generally did so secretly. In one case, a First Secretary of a Central Asian Komsomol (youth organization) committee married a woman according to the precepts of the sharia. In another, an atheist lecturer appealed to a \textit{mullah} to drive “evil spirits” from his child.

\textsuperscript{156} Haghayegh, \textit{Islam}, 26.
\textsuperscript{157} Kolarz, \textit{Religion}, 431.
\textsuperscript{158} Conquest, \textit{Religion}, 74-75.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{160} Bennigsen, \textit{Islam}, 175.
Incidents of this kind were likely prevalent throughout the Muslim republics and exemplifies the state’s inability to control their own officials at the local level.\textsuperscript{161} Islamic theological training was allowed after the reopening of the Mir-i-Arab \textit{madrasa} in 1948 and the Barak Khan \textit{madrasa} in 1956. For the first time since the October Revolution the Qur’an was printed again in Arabic, and in 1953 a highly publicized \textit{hajj} undertaken by twenty-one Soviet Muslims was used to express the benevolence of the state.\textsuperscript{162} The state’s generosity seemed so great that in April 1951 \textit{Mullah} Shakir Khialetdinov declared to the world that it “is divided into two camps, the camps of peace, headed by J. V. Stalin, and the camp of war, headed by the Anglo-American imperialists… If all the people unite in their struggle for peace, the imperialists will be unable to unleash war.”\textsuperscript{163} Despite the Soviet Islamic leaders’ willingness to spread positive propaganda concerning the freedom of conscience enjoyed in the Soviet Union, the reality of religion’s state in the USSR was not as rosy as it appeared.

When an Allied victory seemed certain in 1944, Stalin ordered anti-religious activities to resume. As Haghayegh explains, Stalin continued to willingly utilize Lenin’s double standard approach on religion:

Stalin saw no contradiction in pursuing an antireligious propaganda policy on one hand, and allowing a limited government-sponsored Islamic revival on the other hand. After all, he was chiefly motivated by his foreign policy concerns in the Muslim world, for which his Spiritual Directorates and official clergy seemed to have erected a somewhat perfect façade to mask the realities of Soviet religious life.\textsuperscript{164}

The different republics began making it harder for Muslims to practice their faith. On August 6, 1949 the Tadzhik Supreme Court declared that the weekly day of rest, traditionally Friday to allow Muslims their prescribed prayer day, would be moved to Sunday.\textsuperscript{165} On November of that year Moscow Radio declared that “The Koran justifies the exploitation of man by man. The Moslem religion, moreover, advocates hatred towards all non-Moslems and so opposes

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{161}] Kolarz, \textit{Religion}, 433-434.
\item[\textsuperscript{162}] Conquest, \textit{Religion}, 76-77.
\item[\textsuperscript{164}] Haghayegh, \textit{Islam}, 28.
\item[\textsuperscript{165}] Wilhelm, “Moslems,” 274.
\end{itemize}
international working-class solidarity.” The Znanie had replaced the League of Militant Godless in 1947 when the League had permanently shut down during the war. Znanie members built up popular support throughout the Muslim republics and began increasing their propaganda efforts. Haghayegh argues that “Despite the more comprehensive and systematic character of Znanie activities, it did not seem to have succeeded any more than its predecessor the League of Militant Godless in combatting Islam, or for that matter, other religions in the Soviet Union.” Despite their lack of overarching success, Znanie controlled most of the state’s antireligious propaganda efforts toward Islam.

Znanie sought to educate the people through anti-Islamic propaganda using agitators and various forms of literature, working alongside the directorates to stop the growth of Islam. Islamic religious institutes and publications could not be entirely destroyed or the government’s claims of religious freedom would be proven false. This is why the Central Asian directorate published a Qur’an in Arabic, though it had many printing errors, and every year published a calendar that showed the Hijri and Gregorian calendars side-by-side. Religious education was still banned in state schools, but the directorates could control religious schools for the training of clergy. Only one such school existed for the whole of the Soviet Union until 1956: the Mir-i-Arab madrasa in Bukhara. The quality of education there was poor, for older clergy were unable to fully train clergy in handling the various responsibilities given to them, such as learning how to be a jurist of Muslim law (mufti) or a member of the ulema. In reality, the teaching clergy were only allowed to train new clergy how to lead prayers.

In 1950 the state began boldly denouncing Islam, as Bernard Wilhelm explains using Uzbekistan as an example. “In Uzbekistan any lingering illusions about the regime’s attitude to Islam were dispelled by the local party newspaper which exulted: ‘The revolutionary storm of the popular masses will sweep away the decaying Moslem religion from the face of the earth.’” This type of open criticism would continue until Stalin’s death, but many in the Party

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167 Haghayegh, Islam, 28.

168 Kolarz, Religion, 442-443.

169 Bennigsen, Islam, 173.

did not believe it to be enough. When Khrushchev came to power after Stalin’s death he denounced Stalin for his increasingly relaxed religious policy. Yet Stalin was forced into his appeasing treatment of religion.

Stalin’s actions toward Islam essentially mirrored his actions toward the ROC from the beginning of the war until his death in 1953. For the first time, arguably ever, the state treated the ROC and the Islam in the same way through implementation of a wartime religious policy. In this policy some concessions were given to continue wartime support, an action that was deemed necessary by his government as explained in the previous section. Once the war was over both religions experienced revivals that caused both to grow in legal and illegal ways, alarming the state and presenting it with a difficult decision: harshly shut down the growth of religion to reinstate pre-war religious policies, or appease it so that the progress made in the state’s international image could continue after the war? Stalin chose the latter, but also recommenced anti-religious activity and slowly built it up in preparation for the inevitable complete reestablishment of the Party’s stance toward religion. His death merely prevented him from realizing his plan. Even though Khrushchev denounced Stalin based on these actions, what he eventually undertook in his own religious policies was not too far off from Stalin’s treatment of religion.
CHAPTER FIVE

KHRUSHCHEV’S CONTINUATION OF STALIN

Khrushchev had criticized Stalin’s relaxed policies before his death and sought to renew real attacks on religion. The official reasoning for the renewed attacks was described in a July 7, 1954 Central Committee decree, “On Large Scale Shortcomings in Scientific Atheist Propaganda and Measures for its Improvement:”

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union notes that many party organizations are providing inadequate leadership of scientific atheist propaganda amongst the populations, as a result of which this important aspect of ideological work is in a neglected condition. At the same time the churches and various religious sects have revitalized their activities, strengthened their cadres and adapted flexibly to modern conditions, thus reinforcing their influence on some sections of the population.  

In this decree Khrushchev blamed the resurgence of religion on two main factors. Firstly, Stalin’s hesitation when the Nazi invaded, for the Church had responded quickly in the same circumstances and its actions had given the Church a leadership role during the war. Stalin catered to the Church’s role through concessions and a mutually “beneficial” relationship. Secondly, the adaptation of the Church and other religions to the conditions under Stalin allowed religion to essentially continue as it had before the war. Khrushchev sought to end religion’s growth.

Khrushchev decided to focus on the negative aspects of religion to prove its detrimental effect on the people and state. “The celebration of religious holidays is frequently accompanied by mass drunkenness, mass killing of cattle, causing considerable loss to the economy and drawing thousands of people away from work,” the decree explained. “…Religious prejudices and superstition undermine the consciousness of a part of the Soviet people and reduces their active participation in the building of communism.”  

While the state focused on drunkenness for the ROC, it highlighted different aspects of revelry for different religions, such as fasting for Islam. The state began highlighting random examples of how religious holidays and observances

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172 Ibid., 11.
contributed to radical behavior that affected society, using them as justifications for increasing propaganda and religious persecution.\footnote{Anderson, \textit{Religion}, 11-12.}

The decree contained twelve provisions to be enacted immediately; among these provisions a few stand out from the rest. Firstly, the Department of Agitations and Propaganda was ordered to conduct a series of lectures on how to increase anti-religious propaganda at Marxist-Leninist universities. Secondly, the Ministers of Culture in all republics were to work with the \textit{Znanie} to outline a plan to increase the quality of propaganda by 1956. Thirdly, the \textit{Znanie} was to start publication of a magazine, called \textit{Nauka i Religiya} (Science and Religion), in the near future. Lastly, the state publishing houses, the Academy of Sciences, and the national and local media were to step up anti-religious propaganda activities.\footnote{Haghayegh, \textit{Islam}, 29.} This short-lived campaign was later called the Hundred Days anti-religious campaign, for it only lasted four months. Khrushchev had been determined to formulate a religious policy that would legitimately lead to the elimination of religious prejudices, but his initial plans backfired when their forcefulness was apparent to the public.

These harsher measures were so violent and oppressive that, in a November 10, 1954 decree called “On Errors in the Use of Scientific-atheist Propaganda among the People,” Khrushchev criticized how harshly administrative officials had undertaken these new measures and their malevolent attitude toward the clergy. In this decree Khrushchev was able to carefully avoid placing blame on the state apparatus itself in any way, blaming what had occurred during the Hundred Days campaign on local official errors instead of in the policy itself. From November 1954 until the beginning of 1959 Khrushchev treated all religions more carefully, undertaking only superficial, sporadic measures against religion.\footnote{Powell, \textit{Antireligious}, 39-40.} This decree had a double standard, as the majority of religious policy decrees had in the Soviet state’s history. On the one hand it warned fellow Communists that atheist propaganda must avoid offending the sensibilities of believers due to their freedom of conscience and cautioned them not to believe that religious believers were any less loyal to the state simply because they held religious beliefs. On the other hand, it fully recognized that any overbearing threat to religion would lead to a hardening of beliefs instead of their liquidation. The first standard sounds as though the state wanted to respect
the freedom of conscience, while the second reveals that the state’s concern lay in how effective it could be in destroying religion.176

Though Khrushchev chose to lay low in the implementation of his true religious policy aims, he laid the groundwork for its application early on. At the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev motivated the Party through proclaiming the path toward communism was now clear. He announced at the Twenty-First Party Congress of 1959 that the Soviet Union had entered a new stage in historical development, and that their socialism would soon become communism if a scientific worldview was emphasized to the populace. At the following Party Congress in 1961 Khrushchev predicted that communism would be attained by 1980.177 By building up ideological commitment through the relatively relaxed period of 1954-1959, Khrushchev was able to begin implementation of his religious policies.

A Reversal of Stalin’s Policy?

In the first few years of Khrushchev’s policy toward the ROC the state used Church leaders to spread international messages in support of Soviet foreign policy and rewarded it with more concessions as a result. The ROC was allowed to print a new edition of the Orthodox Prayer Book in January 1956, the first since the Revolution, as well as a new edition of the Bible and a combined New Testament and Psalter.178 Political support in exchange for concessions continued up until 1959, when renewed persecution began. House points out that “There often appears to be a correlation in time between the eloquence with which a travelling churchman expounds Soviet policy abroad and the degree of pressure which is being exerted on the Churches within his country.”179 Khrushchev had resorted to the coercion/propaganda mixture that Stalin employed in his pre-war policy despite his criticisms of Stalin before the Central Committee in 1953.

The state utilized the same “administrative measures” that it had condemned in 1954 to carry out this harsher policy. It began with increased atheist activities in 1958. In the first nine months of 1959 the Znanie had given 335,000 atheist lectures, or four times the number it had

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179 House, *Millennium*, 86.
accomplished in 1956. The Znanie would double this number by 1963. In 1957 there were 102 pro-atheist books published; one year later this total had more than doubled, reaching 264, and in 1962 the number of atheist books was even higher—336. The Znanie’s magazine, the atheist monthly Nauka i Religiya, began publication in 1959 with 70,000 in circulation. By 1966 that number had increased to 230,000.\(^{180}\) Church institutions once again began shutting down in large numbers for a wide variety of reasons. Between 1959 and 1966 the Church had gone from 17,500 churches in 1956, a number which had itself been built up from 4,200 in 1941, to 7,500 in 1966. The eight functioning seminaries the Church possessed by 1958 were reduced to three by 1965.\(^{181}\) The press openly criticized the Church and clergy and used the increasing number of public apostasies by clergy and influential lay people, who undoubtedly folded under the pressure of the state, to show the corruption of the Church. When Professor A. A. Osipov, the Professor of Old Testament at the Leningrad Theological Academy, became one of the apostates on December 9, 1959, particular attention was given in the press about how this learned man had chosen atheism over the religion he had studied most of his life.\(^{182}\)

A January 1960 Central Committee decree entitled “On the Tasks of party Propaganda in Present Conditions” called for a renewed attack on religion, choosing to publically follow the existing laws instead of creating new ones.\(^{183}\) That year the state began systematically closing down theological institutions. In 1960 alone seminaries in Kiev, Stavropol, Saratov, and Odessa were requisitioned. In attacking the seminaries the government deprived students of their residence permits for their place of study and refused to hand out new permits to students who were accepted to these schools. Seminary students were no longer able to defer military service as they had previously, and even priests could be called up for duty after 1959.\(^{184}\)

The Church did not maintain political neutrality but instead reacted against the state at the increased persecutions, mostly likely drawing strength from the relatively greater freedom it had been given in the preceding years. While the Church could not accomplish much in combatting increased atheist publications, it immediately attacked the apostates and excommunicated them.

\(^{180}\) Conquest, Religion, 48-49.
\(^{181}\) Powell, Anti-Religious, 40.
\(^{182}\) Simon, Church, 71.
\(^{183}\) Haghayegh, Islam, 42.
\(^{184}\) Simon, Church, 78.
The excommunications were publicly announced in the Journal of the Patriarchate in February 1960, the first time the ROC had made a public defense of itself in over thirty years. Also, Patriarch Aleksi cautiously decried the state for the “insults and attacks” it had given the Church in an address he gave at a disarmament conference on February 16, 1960.\footnote{Ibid., 71.} The Church’s hesitant defense of itself did nothing to stop the state’s increased persecution.

Even individuals within the government could not do much to help the Church, no matter how influential. Karpov, the head of the CAROC, responded to the calls for increased Church oppression unenthusiastically. As anti-religious activities quickly built up, he tried to fight excesses in this policy himself. In March 1959, for example, Karpov wrote to I. S. Polyansky, the Prime Minister of the RSFSR, complaining about how local officials across Russia were increasingly abusing believers’ rights. Karpov proved with his actions that he wanted to do his job faithfully and with no excesses, as he had told the 1945 ROC sobor. For his defense of the Church, Khrushchev replaced Karpov in 1960 with V. A. Kuroedov, who had served on a few smaller Central Committees, as well as a propaganda council in the years before his switch to the CAROC. By 1965, after Khrushchev had “stepped down” from office, the CAROC and CARC had combined into one centralized council under Kuroedov: the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA).\footnote{Anderson, “Council for Religious Affairs,” 691.} While the actual duties and powers of this council were secret, Kuroedov admitted that the CRA had greater power over, and influence in, religion as well as increased responsibilities within the government.\footnote{Sawatsky, “The New Soviet Law,” 5.}

After the Church attempted to defend itself, Khrushchev came down even harder on religion to cement his control, doing so in two main ways during the last three years of his tenure: firstly, he aimed propaganda toward nonbelievers as well as believers, and secondly, he made legislative changes that altered existing legislation. Khrushchev realized that regular Communists needed propaganda that downplayed religion but also equipped them to ideologically combat believers. Radio, television, and film all portrayed the corruption of religion and accused religion of being a failure; fabricated miracles, child sacrifice, stories of defection from the church, and the actions of immoral clergy all played a part in this
campaign. Individual work was stressed during this period, in which educated atheists would confront believers with the intent of converting them. Many times, however, this occurred through deliberate atheist intrusion into the privacy of people’s homes, which violated Article 128 of the RSFSR Constitution.

New state holidays and secular replacements for church ceremonies began as an attempt to drive out religion’s influence, though this tactic had not been used since the early 1920s. These new holidays and ceremonies did not match the emotional and aesthetic appeal that their church counterparts possessed, and were consequently not effective. Several institutions began opening specialized bodies to begin improving the training of citizens as propagandists. In 1963 Moscow housed many such bodies who taught the history of religion and atheism, the importance of scientific atheism, and the concepts within scientific atheism that students could use to combat religion’s precepts. In 1964 an Institute of Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences was attached to the Central Committee to direct and coordinate this type of work. Some of these institutions focused on teaching religious beliefs to atheists so that they could point out the flaws in religious beliefs.

Scientific claims were created to combat religious ideology, especially in the field of space exploration. In the first issue of *Nauka i Religiy*, Vice-President of the International Astronomical Union Kukarin rejected the existence of heaven because space missions had not discovered it. Similarly, visits to planetariums, question and answer sessions on television, and personal statements by Gagarin, the first Soviet cosmonaut, reinforced this idea. Lectures on atheist themes increased dramatically during this period what had begun as 120,000 lectures in 1954 had skyrocketed to 660,000 in 1963. The state succeeded in increasing the quantity of anti-religious propaganda and continually sought to raise its quality, while simultaneously designing propaganda to minimize the influence of religion on Soviet citizens.

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190 Ibid., 53-54.
191 Ibid., 48-49.
192 Ibid., 49.
193 Ibid., 50.
A number of new legislative developments occurred between 1960 and 1964. The March 1961 Council of Minister’s decree entitled “On the Strict Observation of the Laws on Religious Cults” created a three pronged plan to exterminate religion. Firstly, the clergy and other external elements of religion would be attacked directly. Secondly, the existing laws would be thoroughly implemented. Thirdly, the consequences of breaking laws on religion would be more severe.\textsuperscript{195} A measure which worked hand-in-hand with this decree was the October 19, 1962 amendments to the April 8, 1929 “On Religious Associations.” These twenty-nine amendments to the laws controlling religious practices made the existing laws stronger, more restrictive, and have worse consequences for breaking the law. In an interesting maneuver of the state, these amendments were not publicized. Priests and believers alike were accountable for laws concerning which they had no knowledge. This allowed the state to arrest even more people than it might have if believers had been forewarned of the legal changes.\textsuperscript{196}

The Central Committee adopted three more articles to the RSFSR Criminal Code on July 26, 1962: Article 142 listed violations of the laws of separation of church from state and state from school, Article 143 modified when authorities could legally obstruct the performance of religious rites, and Article 227 explained what constituted infringements of the rights of individuals under the guide of performing religious rites. This last article provided a blanket excuse for the state to attack any kind of religious activity outside of a registered religious building, the punishment for which being confinement or internal exile for up to five years.\textsuperscript{197} In November 1963 the Party’s Ideological Committee created the Institute of Scientific Atheism to study atheism so that courses could be added to the educational system, though similar attempts had occurred through Stalin’s tenure. These classes eventually became mandatory for all students.\textsuperscript{198}

The majority of Khrushchev’s anti-religious measures had been utilized before in Lenin and Stalin’s policies. Khrushchev took their policies one step farther by adding restrictions that clergy and lay-believers had not seen before, an observation William Fletcher develops in an article describing Khrushchev’s religious policies. “The direct use of force was widely applied,

\textsuperscript{195} Haghayegh, \textit{Islam}, 32.
\textsuperscript{196} House, \textit{Millennium}, 91.
\textsuperscript{197} Anderson, \textit{Religion}, 36.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 40.
and if the massive brutality of the prewar period was not emulated, many of the individual measures introduced were more severe than their precedents had been.”

For example, the law forbid children under eighteen from receiving religious instruction and did not allow clergy to attract these minors into religious societies. Khrushchev extended his interpretation to mean that religious services could not begin until all children under eighteen left the premises. As Fletcher explains, “These measures are without parallel in Soviet history; the most that was ever done in the thirties was to claim that it was illegal for parents to force their children to go to church against their will.”

Another example that shows the severity of breaking the newer restrictions on religion is the several known cases where Soviet parents who taught religion to their own children who were denied parental rights as a result, their children sent to atheist, state-owned boarding schools. While the legal precedent for these actions was justified at a Komsomol congress in 1962, this type of private interference in the lives of Soviet citizens had not been seen since tsarist times and was condemned by all, believer or communist atheist alike.

Powell argues that Khrushchev utilized five methods of eradicating religion by the end of his tenure. Firstly, he “sought to provide a social and economic environment that guarantees all citizens equal opportunity to develop—under the party’s close supervision and control.” Secondly, he harassed clergy and laypeople using an elaborate network of legal and semi-legal barriers to the expression of faith, sometimes ignoring the law altogether and utilizing force. Thirdly, he launched a campaign to understand religion so it could be overcome through knowledge. Fourthly, he devised alternative secular holidays and ceremonies to mark important events in a citizen’s life in place of religion. Lastly, he began programs to reshape human consciousness to create the ideal Soviet person. All five methods were certainly used in various combinations to undermine and overthrow religion, though some were emphasized more than others.

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200 Ibid., 144.
201 Ibid., 144-145. Fletcher provides many examples of extreme cases of anti-religious activity between pages 143-153, citing primary documentation for almost all of his information.
202 Powell, Antireligious, 16.
203 Ibid., 17.
Near the end of Khrushchev’s tenure public and official approval for his anti-religious policies began to decline. There is evidence that believers and even Party officials began complaining to the CRA about the excesses committed in the implementation of religious policy. While these complaints did not change policy or its implementation, it did have an impact on how Brezhnev formulated his own religious policies. When Khrushchev blamed local authorities for being excessively stringent it seemed like he was shifting blame, but in the early 1960’s there is little evidence that the state ordered the more brutal measures seen across the Union.

Citizens began writing the government, asking why religion should be so severely mistreated. One atheist suggested that religion and communism had similar goals and should work together to achieve communism, with similar views of compromise dominating a minority of Party members, but the state rejected his arguments.

Many of these suggestions came at a time when Khrushchev appeared to be losing his mind. His foreign policy decisions were increasingly disturbing the Party, and his line on religious policy was not producing the kinds of results that had been expected. By 1964 a small group no longer saw the point of a state-sponsored attack on religion, a train of thought that would grow in the next two decades until it dominated public opinion.

George Kline points out the weakness of the state’s position concerning capitalism during this time through recounting an outlandish explanation of the survival of religion:

The failure of religion to “wither away” at the present advanced stage of transition from socialism to communism—more than half a century after the October revolution—is now “explained” as a result of new insecurity and fear that has been generated in the Soviet populace by the threat of thermonuclear war. Because, in the official account, such a war would be launched only be “capitalist” governments, the persistence of religion in Soviet society is explained as a result—indirect rather than direct—of the evils of the capitalist socio-economic system!

The inefficacy and abuses of Khrushchev’s system would strongly impact the approach Brezhnev implemented in his policies. Brezhnev would seek to avoid some of the major

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205 Ibid., 23.
criticisms that Khrushchev had received concerning the ROC, mainly the ineffectiveness of propaganda, the harsh manner in which it was undertaken, and poor reasoning for the Party’s line on religion. As Khrushchev’s policy toward Islam will show, the same problems occurred in more than just his position on the ROC.

**Khrushchev’s Floundering Policy Toward Islam**

Khrushchev’s policy toward Islam was markedly different from his approach toward the Church. Bennigsen summed up the differences between Stalin and Khrushchev simply when he said: “In the post-war years, Stalin agreed to an easing of persecution of Islam at home and the use of the Soviet Islamic establishment for tentative openings to the Muslim world abroad. Nikita Khrushchev reversed the first part of this formula and expanded the second.” Powell argues that “Islam has fared relatively well, especially in the period since Stalin’s death. Soviet foreign policy objectives in the Middle East have overridden concern about the Moslems as a religious and/or nationality problem. The regime apparently views Islam as a bridge to the Middle East, rather than simply as a barrier to domestic socioeconomic change.” The potential benefits of improving relations with Middle Eastern countries far outweighed the struggle against religion in Khrushchev’s mind. That is not to say that the regime failed to persecute Muslims during Khrushchev’s tenure but rather that it was a subdued persecution, arguably more so than persecution under Stalin had been. Khrushchev had found himself in the same kind of situation that Stalin had during World War II and made the same decision that Stalin had, that cooperation was sometimes more beneficial to the state’s image and power than upholding the Communist ideology.

Khrushchev had several concerns at hand when he began his tenure that contributed toward a relaxed policy for Islam. Relations with Israel were heated as Khrushchev had withdrawn support for Israel, and Gamal Abdel Nasser’s rise to power in Egypt made Middle Eastern relations even more vital. Nasser was famous for his messages of pan-Arabism and pan-Islam. Since the USSR wanted extended influence in the Middle East it needed to show that it was mollifying Islam within its territories to appease Nasser and his supporters. Khrushchev was also preoccupied with bureaucratic reorganization and a poor economy, among other pressing

domestic issues. Since religion had persisted throughout the Soviet Union, and as a result of the Hundred Days anti-religious campaign, he called for a reevaluation of religious policy before ordering further actions against religion.\(^{210}\)

Khrushchev discovered that there were several qualitative concerns, the first of which was the content of propaganda against Islam. The content was seen as obsolete, making it ineffective, so he decided to modernize propaganda to make it more citizen-friendly. Secondly, he discovered that many individuals who were charged with spreading propaganda had weak ideological commitment to communism. When Stalin had been confronted by the same problem, he responded with a massive purge of the Party. Khrushchev opted for a more selective screening process for individuals who spread propaganda. Thirdly, communism still could not compete with the symbolism found in religious rituals.\(^{211}\) From 1954 to 1959 Khrushchev focused on these qualitative concerns and resorted to building up the anti-religious mindset within the Party.

After the war, the Znanie had been propagating anti-religious messages throughout Central Asia primarily through the mediums of lectures and publications. Each Spiritual Directorate and branch of the Znanie arranged atheist lectures for their regions numbering in the thousands each year and printed their own anti-religious publications. From January 1955 to August 1957, eighty-four atheist works were made and distributed in Muslim areas of the USSR. From January 1962 to December 1964 that number had almost tripled to 210 anti-religious works devoted to Islam or addressed to Soviet Muslims.\(^{212}\) Through Khrushchev’s tenure Klimovich was still the main authority on the official views of Islam, though Wheeler notes that “Klimovich’s work is raised above the level of crude propaganda by considerable scholarship, but he has not so far made any attempt to conceal the Party’s built-in hostility to Islam and all that it stands for.”\(^{213}\)

By the mid-1950s a tentative plan to employ Muslims more systematically in Muslim countries where the Soviets wanted to expand—particularly Egypt, Syria, Iraq (after the 1958 revolution), and Lebanon—began to develop. Initially only secular, nationally-Islamic political officials travelled to these countries and no religious officials were allowed to participate in


\(^{211}\) Ibid., 31-32.

\(^{212}\) Bennigsen, *Islam*, 176-177.

Soviet endeavors in the Middle East. For most of Khrushchev’s tenure the only religious representatives in Middle Eastern countries were those undertaking the *hajj*.  

Khrushchev carried out a hesitant policy of transition in his religious policy toward the Middle East, beginning with Soviet political delegations, slowly building up toward the goal of receiving religious delegations, and by the early 1960s allowing Soviet and other Middle Eastern countries’ religious delegations to meet.

For this slow and steady plan to succeed in winning over Muslim Middle Eastern countries, the state only needed to ensure that Soviet Muslims remained unified at home. The state began building up the Soviet Islamic identity abroad and consistently applied a fairly relaxed propaganda campaign against Soviet Muslims at home. In 1959 the USSR began radio broadcasts in Arabic from Baku which increasingly asserted the idea of international Islamic solidarity. The state also created the Department of International Relations of the four Muslim Spiritual Directorates to discuss the Soviet plan in the Middle East. This department was located in Moscow instead of the ideal location of Tashkent, for the government wanted to show that it would continue to keep tight control over Islam in its Middle East policy. The state utilized Muslim clerics to spread the message of Islamic solidarity among the Muslim republics, proclaiming that the Soviet Union was a Muslim state. These clerics would use the denigration of Israel and Great Britain to unite Muslims together, which also helped them relate to the situation of Middle Eastern Muslims.

At the same time, however, the state continued to push anti-religious propaganda against Muslims. Conquest claims that “Since 1957-1958 Muslims have been exposed to most of the forms of anti-religious work which characterized the Party’s intensified campaign against religious belief,” for it employed the same types of tactics that it had been using through the years: mosques were closed “at the request of believers,” pilgrimages were regulated and stopped, individual atheist lectures continued to increase in number, media like film and radio accused Islam as being false, and officials continued to discredit Muslim religious leaders. Authors like Klimovich continued to spout anti-Islam messages, such as the popular explanation

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215 Ibid., 34.
216 Conquest, Religion, 78.
that Islam was “a fraud deliberately invented by a class society and exploited by the imperialist powers in their own selfish interests.”\textsuperscript{217}

Several inconveniences prevented the anti-religious campaign in Muslim republics from being effective. Firstly, the quality and efficacy of anti-Islamic propaganda was still poor. Since all anti-religious propaganda had been restricted to scientific arguments in the late 1950s, the same type of information was presented in the same unimaginative manner year after year. As Bennigsen describes, “The result of their efforts is at once pedantic, laborious and calculated to bore their readers to extinction.”\textsuperscript{218} Secondly, religion had been forced underground by the state’s strictures and was still strong in the lives of Soviet Muslims. Muslim acts like fasting and prayer were difficult to eradicate because it could occur at any time and place, while the profession of belief known as the \textit{shahada} is done in one’s heart instead of verbally and equally impossible to prevent.\textsuperscript{219} Religious services could occur anywhere that believers gathered, as evidenced by a September 1963 \textit{Nauka i Religiya} article in which officials complained that “scarcely a collective form or \textit{Kishlak} [village] will be found in the Republic, where there is not a mosque existing under the guise of a tea-room or restaurant.”\textsuperscript{220}

Lastly, local officials tended to participate in religious ceremonies and functions. As opposed to the ROC, for which the odds of a local official being atheist were much higher, the majority of local officials in Muslim republics continued to observe Muslim traditions. On July 4, 1963, for example, Party members and Komsomol agents in Azerbaijan were accused by Azerbaijan’s First Party Secretary of participating in the tenth day of the Muslim month of Moharram, when Muslims commemorated the chief martyrs of Shi’a Islam. That September, Party officials in Uzbekistan were caught attending Muslim prayer meetings and religious ceremonies. Two months later Party officials were seen at Muslim ceremonies in Tadzhikistan.\textsuperscript{221} No matter how forcefully the state tried to prevent Islamic observances from occurring in Muslim society, the people always found a way.

\textsuperscript{217} Wheeler, “National,” 194.
\textsuperscript{218} Bennigsen, \textit{Islam}, 178.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 178-179.
\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Nauka i Religiya}, 1963, no. 9, 75, qtd. in Robert Conquest, \textit{Religion in the USSR} (New York: Praeger, 1968), 79.
\textsuperscript{221} Conquest, \textit{Religion}, 80.
Soviet Muslim officials began to argue that Islam should not be persecuted and instead accepted by the government after seeing socialism and pan-Islam combine in Egypt the late 1950s. The major arguments used by the *ulema* and *muftis* were designed to combat the anti-religious assertions of the Soviet regime. According to Polonskaya there were seven main arguments utilized:

(1) Islam is a religion corresponding to the prevailing conditions of the modern world in the greatest measure; (2) Islam is the least dogmatic and most dynamic religion of all; (3) Islam is a harbinger of socialism and contains its main principles; (4) Islam is the religion of the oppressed and unfortunate; (5) Islam is the only religion capable of preserving human morals and values from the destructive influence of modern technocratic civilization; (6) Islam contains the spiritual sources of the national culture of each people of Central Asia; (7) Islam is the most internationalist of all religions.

Their arguments made sense, especially when juxtaposed to the arguments against Islam offered by the state. These arguments attempted to combat state claims that Islam was a backward religion, that was incompatible with the state’s eventual establishment of global communism, and that it was inherently immoral and irrelevant. These arguments undoubtedly affected how Brezhnev formulated his policy toward Islam, for he was more lenient in his policy than Khrushchev had been. As the Brezhnev era and détente began, religious policy would change yet again, but only in a subtle way.

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CHAPTER SIX

BREZHNEV AND DÉTENTE

Brezhnev appeared reluctant to directly intervene in religious matters in the manner that Khrushchev had, instead focusing on tightening up the enforcement of the existing laws. He also called for a systematic reappraisal of propaganda efforts under Khrushchev and a comprehensive study of belief systems so that more effective propaganda could be created. Brezhnev focused on atheist education instead of directly attacking religion. He pushed for the creation of the “ideal Soviet man,” or the person who exemplified Leninist ideology in everything he did and believed. His focus on this ideal caused him to believe that a true break from religion would only occur if each believer change psychologically, which could not come about merely from physical threat.

An August 1965 Komsomol Pravda article explained the new state’s policy shift in direct terms:

Today we are again lulling ourselves [by the thought that] many believers in our country have left the Church and religion. This is self-deception. It is true that in the great part of the Soviet Union’s territory there are no churches and no servants of the cult. But believers there are… The closing of a parish does not make atheists out of believers. On the contrary, it attracts people to religion all the more and furthermore embitters their hearts.

In October 1965 the CARC issued a referendum explaining that the registration of religious communities would be granted to all who expressed a willingness to abide by Soviet laws on religion. This view was remarkably liberal given how enthusiastically the state had denied registration to churches. Nauka i Religiya began publishing critiques of Khrushchev’s policies and condemned the crude repressive tactics he had employed at times. A differentiation was made between the normal believers of the Soviet Union and the few religious fanatics who gave them a bad reputation. “‘Understand in order to help’ became the order of the day,” Conquest

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223 Haghayegh, Islam, 34.
225 Anderson, Religion, 74.
explains, “and atheist workers were reminded that the majority of believers were ‘honest workers, building Communism together with all Soviet people.’”226

In 1966 three laws were added to the RSFSR Criminal Code concerning religion. Article 142 of this Code had made violating the separation of church and state illegal but had not previously clarified exactly what this meant. The first law clarified what types of offenses violated the separation of church and state.227 Punishable offenses included, among others, mass dissemination, or preparing for the purpose of mass dissemination, of appeals, letters, tracts, or other documents that urge nonobservance of legislation on religious cults… organization or conduct of religious meetings, processions, and other religious ceremonies that violate the social order… [and the] organization or systematic conduct of studies of religion for the instruction of minors in violation of rules established by legislation.228

The second law made re-offenses punishable by up to three years in prison. The third law described administrative penalties involving breaking the laws governing religious matters like the registration of religious communities.229 Similar decrees were passed for individual republics, but it is highly likely that these new laws were directed toward the Protestant sectarians, especially the Baptists.230 The focus of the state having shifted to the Baptists, the ROC enjoyed a period of relaxation that it had not experienced in two decades.

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Dissidents

With the effort of achieving détente came a rise in the traditional functions of the Church, like marriages, baptisms, and funerals. Brezhnev allowed a relaxation in the legal restrictions against the ROC in areas like these, though there was still mild state control. For instance, child baptism was now allowed though both parents needed to give consent, Church officials needed to be registered, and the baptism itself had to be performed in a registered Church building. Brezhnev allowed minor concessions such as these because he realized that Khrushchev’s

226 Conquest, Religion, 61.
227 Haghayegh, Islam, 34.
229 Haghayegh, Islam, 34.
230 Conquest, Religion, 63. In an endnote on this page Conquest lists the publications for nine other republics along with their publication dates that contained similar law revisions.
restrictions had not worked as planned. Gerhard Simon argues that Brezhnev might have considered that two other influences might have been at play. “Another reason for the relaxation of pressure is probably that the state repression had by now hit a ‘hard core’ in the Church which could not be destroyed even by means of the methods previously used. Finally, it is also possible that Western protests against Church persecution, which were precisely recorded in the Soviet Union…helped to alter this course.”

Brezhnev sought to change the people through an increase in the quantity and quality of atheist education. In 1966 the long-awaited magazine *Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma* (Questions of Scientific Atheism) began publication. Scholars were drawn to the field of the sociology of religion, for they wanted to understand how to make propaganda better in quality and efficiency, but there were considerable limitations in what they were able to accomplish. For instance, their research was distorted by ideological considerations from the state and from the untruthful responses given in surveys concerning religion. Undesirable information was often left out of their findings entirely, making all of their research suspect, but their “findings” contributed to the state’s understanding of religion nonetheless. By 1969 the leadership believed that further improvement could occur in atheist cadres, the mass measures of reaching the populace, and the development of individual work with believers. Yet despite this goal, the state still complained about these areas in anti-religious propaganda almost fifteen years later.

Party officials began to understand that eradicating religion would be much harder than previously imagined. Various theories began to appear within the Party as to the best method of approach. The traditional view that religion would eventually disappear on its own as socialism progressed was still reiterated, but when or how was highly debated and remained a complex topic. Some officials within the Party, like senior researcher at the Institute of Scientific Atheism V. Konavelev, wanted a return to Stalinist measures. Konavelev emphasized the achievements of the Stalinist period and of the League of Militant Godless in his writings. Other officials, however, cared nothing for the anti-religious struggle and expected gradual social change to accomplish what the Party could not. A smaller minority of officials gave up on religious repression altogether and had begun actively participating in religious ceremonies or extolling

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231 Simon, *Church*, 89-90.
233 Ibid., 115.
the Church’s contributions to the state and to the development of Russian culture. The execution of state ideology began to weaken and slow down during the late 1960s and early 1970s as Party officials could not decide on a united Party position to carry out.

The indecision and inefficacy of anti-religious propaganda had become apparent to all by the 1970s. On top of that, the state had begun crossing the line between anti-religious and anti-civil rights as the freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and freedom of association were taken away, among other rights. The government’s disregard for its citizens while pursuing an end to religion caused many Soviet citizens to question the anti-religious campaign altogether. One segment of society openly questioned the state’s actions: the Russian intelligentsia. Many of these “dissidents” were believers or sympathized with the plight of the believers.

Kline describes three main themes within intellectual dissident movements during the 1970s in his article “Religious Ferment Among Soviet Intellectuals.” These intellectuals used religious or semi-religious arguments to combat the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the state. The three themes Kline explicates are what he calls the “Skovorodian,” “Teilhardian,” and “Rozanovian” themes. The Skovorodian theme called for a revolt against science and technology’s centrality in state ideology; the Teilhardian theme called for a transformation of the world through the religious, rather than the socioeconomic or technological, transfiguration of man; and the Rozanovian theme called for a Kierkegaardian realization of the preciousness of individual existence instead of contributing to the progression of socialism in the world. The Soviet state now had to combat more than simply religion: it had to counteract dissident movements that drew from religion as well. This only added to the government’s apparent problems in implementing a unified policy.

The majority of the day-to-day policy changes in Brezhnev’s regime were made by subordinate bodies like the CRA, KGB, and local organizations instead of by the Central Committee itself. Brezhnev played a surprisingly insignificant role in the formation of religious policy during his tenure, seemingly content in simply signing off on the actions of others. The

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234 Ibid., 76-77.
236 George Kline, “Religious Ferment Among Soviet Intellectuals,” in *Religion and the Soviet State: a dilemma of power*, eds. William Fletcher and Max Hayward (New York: Praeger, 1969), 57. The listing of the themes is found on page 57, while the entire ten pages of the article describes the meaning of each theme.
signature of E. I. Lisavtsev, a member of the Ideology Department, was on many of the documents regarding policy changes. He signed a lot of papers, represented the Central Committee on editorial boards of the main atheist publications (Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma and Nauka i Religiya), and acted as a troubleshooter when policy problems arose. Anderson notes that as late as 1986 he flew out to areas where propaganda seemed to have failed.²³⁷ Others influential characters included KGB chairman Yury Andropov, who continually asked for approval to deal with non-conformists in his own manner, and Politburo member Mikhail Suslov, who kept the anti-religion flame alive for fear of losing Soviet society to the growing public religious dissent.²³⁸

In order to quell dissent and still further the state’s anti-religious policies, the 1929 law “On Religious Associations” was amended in 1975. The result was greater control by the CRA over the registration of religious communities. By centralizing control within the CRA instead of entrusting this task to local officials, the state hoped to cut down the number of local administrative abuses and achieve a more consistent implementation of policy, which it ultimately failed to do. All the religious believers noticed that the central government was giving itself further control over them, for the bribery and coercion tactics clergy used to pressure local authorities to get tasks done in their favor were now rendered unviable.²³⁹ The amendments publically outlined the powers of the CRA. After the revisions fourteen articles mention the powers of the CRA, three articles (Articles 18, 52, and 64) were altered by the CRA, and six articles (Articles 21, 22, 24, 35, 37, and 42) were dropped altogether. The CRA now had all regulatory and legislative powers over religious affairs.²⁴⁰

Samzidat (illegal dissident) publications throughout the 1960s and 1970s show that the abuse of believer’s rights, including the persistent evasion from registering churches, was systematic throughout the period before the 1975 revisions and was not much changed after the revisions began implementation. Since the number of closures remained high and the opening of church buildings remained low believers inferred that the CRA simply ignored requests to register Church buildings, probably due to pressure from the Central Committee to keep the

²³⁷ Anderson, Religion, 102-103.
²³⁸ Ibid., 104.
number of registered churches low. Also, the range of control the Central Committee can have on its regional officers is not high unless a clear, direct policy is handed down to them, something Anderson argues had not occurred since Khrushchev’s tenure.\footnote{Anderson, “Council for Religious Affairs,” 699.} As local authorities ostensibly continued to carry out abuses (excluding the registration of church buildings, of course) at the same time that regional state officials denied registrations and closed ecclesiastical buildings, it is easy to see how believers could confuse which actions came from the CRA itself and which were only committed at the local level; this confusion only added to the dissident movements in the end.

Kuroedov as the chairman of the CRA began writing in support of his agency, reflecting the state’s views as he did so. He believed that the essential principle in church/state relations was that of noninterference. The government would not step in to regulate believers unless they had broken the law. When public discussion occurred in the press for the 1977 draft constitution, the government only publicized comments that were remarkably restrictive toward religion so that when the state voiced its own opinions it seemed moderate. Many dissident believers wrote the government asking for stronger freedom of religion laws to replace those on the freedom of conscience, noting that parts of the 1929 “On Religious Associations” violated some United Nations statutes and Lenin’s 1918 separation of church and state laws.\footnote{Anderson, \textit{Religion}, 78-80.} The government tried to quietly handle such voices, however, and sought not to draw too much attention to religious issues. This was partially due to the fact that the state continued to award the ROC concessions in return for supporting it internationally.

Atheist writers had begun writing on how the ROC had used these minor concessions to advance the growth of religion within the Soviet Union. For instance, Archbishop Nikolai of Vladimir and Suzdal was known for how skillfully he represented the Soviet ROC internationally, but at the same time he encouraged churches in his region to preach more sermons openly. Opportunities like this were created by the state’s decision to employ religious leaders for its own benefit, a policy that had survived in force since World War II. In February 1978, for example, Kuroedov wrote the Central Committee recommending that the ROC be allowed to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Moscow patriarchate on the grounds that the state could manipulate the celebration internationally to prove its stance on the freedom of
conscience. The state’s willingness to permit the ROC the freedom to undertake some religious actions that were against its official stance on religion so that it could benefit in some way only made it more obvious that religion would not die out as the Party had hoped. Testimonies by religious activists like Fr. Dmitri Dudko emphasized how religious activities that had taken on political persuasions had not been punished in any way, which further spread confidence among believers.

This continued relaxation in religious persecution caused the Central Committee’s Secretariat to realize in 1979 that religiosity in families had not been impacted by anti-religious propaganda or atheist educational curriculums at all. The number of Soviet children who participated in religious ceremonies or attended illegal religious schools and camps was growing, which the Secretariat predictably blamed on the weakness in the quality of atheist propaganda. The Soviet public, believer and nonbeliever alike, had become disinterested in the struggle between atheism and religion, as well as in anti-religious propaganda as a whole. By the late 1970s religious communities were partially revitalized. The state had inadvertently driven its citizens toward religion with its propaganda, even those who were not religious beforehand! The Marxist-Leninist ideology proved taxing to many dissidents, and many sought an ideology to replace the one that had been pressed upon them their whole lives. For many, this was religion.

As renowned dissident and former Party activist Major-General Pyotr Grigorenko stated in a 1978 interview, “I am no longer a communist, although I professed this teaching almost my entire conscious life… I see no communist state system which has not stifled its people, deprived it of its human rights, liquidated freedom and democracy, established full lordship of a party-state bureaucracy… And if I must call myself anything, I would agree simply to take the name ‘Christian.’”

The creation of new secular ceremonies to replace religious ones was an example of how unoriginal and inadequate government anti-religious undertakings had become by 1979. The new

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243 Ibid., 88.
244 Ibid., 118.
245 Ibid., 86-87.
rites held minimal impact at best even though the instances of public use of these new ceremonies increased throughout the 1970s. One commentator noted how the new rituals were dressed up “in pseudo-religious form” that caused “laughter from those participating.” These ceremonies failed to bring people together like their religious counterparts did. In fact, the new rites were often short of supplies because the state was reluctant to assign funds or time for their development. The ultimate result was a rise in Church ceremonies as the most attractive ceremony option.

Andropov, who would succeed Brezhnev in a few short years as General Secretary of the Party, decided to take matters into his own hands and used the KGB to increase the repression of religion and other dissent. As Andropov increased his own power and enforced his own policy of ideological zalkalka (hardening), the Central Committee began imitating his actions. In 1981 Pravda published an editorial on atheism, its first since 1972. One month later the Central Committee issued a decree on the strengthening of atheist education. In June 1983 the Central Committee organized a plenum entirely devoted to atheist ideology, the first of its kind in over twenty years. Atheist writers like Aleksander Shamaro began drawing attention to the subtle tactics the Church had utilized to associate itself with nationalism and its fate to the fate of the nation.

Andropov would succeed the ineffective Brezhnev after his death on November 10, 1982. Brezhnev’s policy would begin the dive in strict control over the ROC, which would ultimately end in almost complete religious freedom by the fall of the Soviet regime. In an effort to avoid the excesses and austere oppression that characterized Khrushchev’s policies toward religion, Brezhnev had loosened the regulations confining religious activities. The problems began when no structured plan in regulating religion was created and was compounded when dissidents in both the secular and religious sections of public opinion attacked the state’s ideology. Since the ideological backing of atheist education and propaganda had faltered in supporting these purposes, Soviet citizens saw no purpose for the state’s ideology or its attacks on religion and began exploring religion instead. Brezhnev’s policy towards Islam would reveal similar

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248 Anderson, Religion, 120.
249 Ibid., 121.
250 Ibid., 106.
251 Ibid., 119.
deficiencies, especially in continuing Khrushchev’s efforts to improve relations with the Middle East.

**Nationalism and the Invasion of Afghanistan**

At the beginning of Brezhnev’s career as General Secretary of the Party, significant effort was utilized in learning more about Islam to better understand the religious situation inside and outside of the country. Two main results came from this endeavor: public discussion on the difference between national identity and nationalism and an eye-opening realization that Islam was stronger than ever in the USSR. Soviet scholars of Islam like M. Stepanyants, L. Gordon-Polonskaya, and P. Petrushevsky wrote articles and lectures on the state of Islam in the world. In particular, Petrushevsky’s compilation of lectures deceptively entitled *Islam in Iran* was the most impartial and complete work on the history and state of Islam throughout the world to be published in the 1960s in any language.\(^{252}\) The Islamic scholars from Brezhnev’s tenure were better-educated than any before them and began contributing to policy formation in the late 1960s. The Imam Ismail al-Bukhari theological school opened in Tashkent in 1971 and succeeded in providing new official Islamic clerics with excellent training that improved the overall quality of the officials.\(^{253}\) The contributions of these scholars made a huge impact on state and public knowledge of Islam, which their explication of the differences between national consciousness and nationalism shows.

The government had traditionally confused the ideas of national consciousness and nationalism, a confusion that continued in the beginning of the Brezhnev era. National consciousness is the solidarity between members of a group, whereas nationalism is the political push for the creation and maintenance of a national state. National consciousness was the appropriate term with which to describe the Soviet Muslims at this time, for they were bound together by their religion and their resistance to the Soviet government, not by political machinations to form a Muslim nation-state. Throughout its history the leaders of the Soviet Union had feared the latter, hence their fascination and persistent ignorance to the differences between the two terms.\(^{254}\) In order to spread awareness of the differentiation between these two


terms a number of articles appeared to explain the two concepts and outline the problems that could result from confusing them. In one 1967 article, the author explicates how “In our [Soviet] literature we often come across the expression ‘the Muslim section of the population.’ However, this often refers to both the believing and the non-believing members of a nationality which formerly professed the Islamic religion.”

Soviet scholars had divided the “Muslim” population into “believing Muslim” and “non-believing Muslim,” which had only contributed to the confusion. Through the state’s research into the Muslim identity it discovered that even atheists believed that their national identity involved performing certain religious rites and customs found in Islam, leading to more confusion when the state failed to differentiate between the believing and non-believing ethnic-Muslims in its policies. This fusion of national identity and religion caused any influence Islam had over the population to be a greater threat than previously imagined, for even atheists were already comfortable with the ceremonies and practices of believing Muslims. Since recent studies had shown that Islam was the second largest religion in the USSR in terms of adherents, state ignorance in the national identity issue threatened to contribute to an already large potential threat to its power.

In fact, a whole underground Islamic movement Bennigsen calls “parallel Islam” had been gaining force despite Khrushchev’s repressive era. The extent of parallel Islam’s growth had not been fully known until Brezhnev’s scholars studied it. This form of Islam was more militant and active than the state’s version of Islam, with a population that grew every day. Brezhnev backed off of anti-Islamic propaganda and reverted to propaganda in support of scientific atheism. “Rather,” Bennigsen explains, “the Soviet leadership realized that political flexibility was both necessary and possible on this issue, and they moved to develop a Janus-like strategy which stressed the dangers of unrestrained Islam at home while simultaneously, albeit cautiously, advancing the notion that Islam abroad could be a progressive, even a revolutionary factor.” An example of this flexible strategy was reflected in the writings of Soviet author G. M. Kerimov. “Islamic socialism may be used by reactionary circles as a new ideological weapon.

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256 Ibid., 44.
258 Bennigsen, Soviet Strategy, 36.
against Marxism-Leninism; it may also become a new bourgeois illusion concerning socialism, but it may become a revolutionary anti-capitalist reformist movement, for instance as was the case in Syria, Algeria or in the United Arab Republic.”

Unlike the leaders who had come before him, Brezhnev oriented his Islamic policy toward Muslims outside of the USSR almost exclusively. The scientific atheism propaganda that he utilized within the USSR was representative of the indirect propaganda he employed from 1965 until 1980. The most prevalent form of this propaganda was the educationally-oriented propaganda in the press, media, and Komsomol publications with little persecution to enforce it. Many of the persecutions Khrushchev had begun Brezhnev either significantly reduced or stopped altogether. For example, the closing of mosques stopped altogether and remained at a stable number—about 500 officially registered—until 1980, though this could also be explained in the refusal of the CRA to register more buildings.

What Khrushchev had tentatively begun in the early 1960s Brezhnev had developed and extensively implemented. In 1968 Soviet muftis began to travel extensively on behalf of the Soviet state, spreading pro-Soviet propaganda to Muslim countries and representing the state at Islamic functions. For instance, mufti Ziauddin Babakhanov travelled to a November 1968 Islamic Conference in Rawalpindi, Pakistan where he lectured on anti-US, Israeli, and British imperialism. In 1969 he travelled to Morocco, In January-February 1971 he led a pilgrimage to Mecca, and made side trips to Egypt, Syria and Jordan that same year. Foreign Muslim delegations began travelling into the Soviet Union also beginning in 1968, though the state only exposed them to “highly selective and carefully orchestrated aspects of Muslim life in the USSR.”

The state’s attention to international image through the utilization of the muftis caused it to unintentionally allow the quality of other propaganda types to drop. In 1971 one writer wrote an article asking the government to improve Soviet anti-religious propaganda. The two failures in propaganda prompted this article’s publication: firstly, untrained individual atheists did not know much about Islam, and secondly, the purely academic rhetoric of the scientific atheism


260 Bennigsen, Soviet Strategy, 35.

261 Ibid., 39-40.
propaganda already in production did not convince the non-academic masses of the communist cause. A short story illustrated his argument:

A learned individual arrived in Baku. He had come to give a lecture to the Caspian Sea oilwell workers on an anti-religious subject. The club was crowded, and silence reigned. Quarter of an hour later, nobody was listening to the lecturer. From the rostrum there poured a flood of abstruse words, difficult to understand “agnostic attitudes”, “monistic teachings”, “dualism”. A middle-aged, sturdily built worker turned to his younger next door neighbor and asked “What is dualism?” The young man did not know.

The author argued that “You will never succeed in bringing a believer over onto your side by arguments of the type: ‘There is no God, because no God exists’. The believer must be given convincing, indisputable evidence.”

Worse than poorly conceived pro-Soviet propaganda was propaganda used incorrectly by the state, especially due to ignorance or lack of thought. The Soviet regime proved its lack of thought when it sent abroad three anti-Islam pamphlets in 1973. “The Qur’an, Its Doctrine and Philosophy,” in English and Arabic for the peoples of Damascus and Sri Lanka and “Peut-on Croire au Coran?” (Can One Believe the Qur’an?) in French for the people of Mauritania. These pamphlets emphasized the ambiguity and paradox of Brezhnev’s policy, for the state sought to reach out to these peoples and then sent them anti-Islam propaganda instead. The pamphlets negatively impacted the Soviet’s prestige abroad, especially when the state blamed Western intelligence agencies for its creation and disbursal. It created three organizations that would become prominent propaganda tools: the Afro-Asian Solidarity organization, the Friendship Society, and the Peace Partisans. These organizations operated in countries with which the state had already established relations and attempted to build up relations.

Despite setbacks like these the state made some achievements too. By 1979 the state had succeeded in reaching every corner of the Muslim world with its delegations, establishing friendships with many Muslim countries. The state also succeeded in creating a consistent,

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263 Ibid., 43.
264 Ibid.
265 Bennigsen, Soviet Strategy, 37.
266 Ibid., 53.
effective media support for itself and for its propaganda that the Soviet Muslim population enjoyed full freedom of conscience. It also achieved the incorporation of Soviet Muslims into the majority of the state’s propaganda efforts abroad.\textsuperscript{267} Just as these international successes were coming to fruition, domestic religious problems flared up due to revolutionary activity in Iran.

The outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978-1979 caused several repercussions in Soviet Central Asia. In many areas the Islamic Revolution temporarily strengthened Muslim resolve to demand religious freedom, especially in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, but also in Kirgizstan and Kazakhstan. Anti-Soviet demonstrations, as well as the illegal opening of mosques and religious instruction, occurred in many places. The Soviets reacted in three distinct and contradictory ways to these events. Firstly, since the Islamic Revolution was anti-imperialist in nature, the Soviet government supported it and welcomed the Revolution. The government’s backing was reinforced by its decision to hold three conferences demonstrating the regime’s respect for Islam. The first, a Muslim-nation conference attended by twelve nations including Iran, celebrated the tenth anniversary of the publication of \textit{Muslims of the Soviet East} in 1979; the second, also a 1979 conference, celebrated Soviet Muslim contributions to Islamic thought and was attended by thirty nations; the third, in 1980, celebrated the fifteenth century of the \textit{hegira} (flight) of Muhammad and called for a permanent exposition on Islam in the Soviet Union. It also officially sanctioned Sufism (mystic Islam) in Turkmenistan so that Sufi fundamentalists in Iran could not infiltrate these secret orders in the USSR.\textsuperscript{268}

Secondly, the government tightened up security and law-enforcement regulations in the Muslim republics, for the proximity of Iran to Soviet Muslim territories posed a security threat if Iran’s revolutionary fervor should extend to those territories. The KGB’s presence increased in Muslim territories well into the mid-1980s to combat the possibility of such an influence. Thirdly, the USSR intensified propaganda activities in all the Muslim republics. Articles in \textit{Nauka i Religiya} attacked the reactionary orientation of Islam, a message opposite of what was extolled at the aforementioned conferences. The overall quantity of propaganda also rose steadily and consistently. For instance, in 1981 twenty-four anti-Islamic books had been published, a number that would rise to thirty-seven and seventy-two books in 1982 and 1983, respectively.\textsuperscript{269}

\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 55-56.
\textsuperscript{268} Haghayegh, \textit{Islam}, 35-36.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid., 36-37.
The government built up the Islamic Revolution in Iran and international Islam in general to improve international relations between itself and the Middle Eastern nations. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, however, almost all of the progress the state had made since Khrushchev’s hesitant outreach in the early 1960s was reversed. Almost every Muslim country denounced the Soviet Union for the invasion; the only countries to stand by the USSR were Syria, Libya, South Yemen, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, with Algeria expressing strong reservations. The new leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, put the USSR above the United States in its malevolence, calling it the Greatest Satan on Radio Tehran. The Soviet state sent out the muftis to defend its actions, using them to repeat the same propaganda as usual. The mufti proclamations that foreign imperialist powers had been interfering in Afghan affairs were false, as most Muslims knew. Their complaint that imperialists had been killing Soviet soldiers was also a lie, for the Muslim world knew that their fellow Muslims had been the only ones fighting the Soviets in Iran. The bald-faced lies propagated by the Soviet government showed its complete disregard for the Muslim world in its official ideology, as did the obviously hostile attitude with which it fought the Afghan Muslims. It also exemplified the indecisive policy that Brezhnev continued to have toward Islam.

After the invasion the state kept a low international profile, not publicizing itself in the Middle East nearly as often as it had before the invasion. In 1982 the state made three important changes in its Islamic policy. Firstly, the higher muftis and ulema of the official Islamic hierarchy were completely replaced with younger clerics who had been trained by the institutions created by Brezhnev. These clergy were more loyal to the state than the older muftis had been. Secondly, the state dramatically reduced the exposure of the Soviet Muslim population to foreign scrutiny. Between 1980 and 1986 no international Islamic conferences were called by the state, foreign Muslims rarely visited as had occurred in the Khrushchev era, and the new muftis were systematically utilized abroad. Thirdly, by 1982 the front organizations of the KGB became more focused on religion than political ideology, while the muftis became more focused on politics than religion. This switch allowed a cohesive relationship to form between the official

271 Ibid., 58.
Islamic institutions and the KGB. The closer relationship with the state security apparatus gave the *muftis* greater opportunities to travel abroad.\textsuperscript{272}

Brezhnev’s religious policy worked rather well until the invasion of Afghanistan. Internationally, he was able to build up relations with Middle Eastern countries because of his exaltation of Islam and his use of the Soviet *muftis*. Domestically, he did not appear to have a religious policy for Islam, which the actions (or lack of action) of the CRA and the vacillating opinions of Soviet officials showed. Since Brezhnev focused on international Islam, his domestic propaganda suffered a decrease in quality. Though he made noise to the Party about increasing the quality of propaganda, he did not actually confirm that steps to improve propaganda had begun. Once the invasion of Afghanistan occurred international approval of the Soviet Union dropped dramatically. Andropov had begun tightening up propaganda measures on his own by the time of the invasion, and state actions after 1980 reflect the general measures he instigated, not Brezhnev.

\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., 60-61.
CHAPTER SEVEN

GORBACHEV AND THE MILLENNIUM

The KGB chairman Yury Andropov succeeded Brezhnev in office on November 12, 1982, two days after Brezhnev’s death. In his fifteen months in office he would make many reforms, but little is said about any religious policy he may have implemented. Felix Corley, in narrating between documents in his archival reader on Soviet religion, explains that he merely continued the increase in persecution that had started in 1980. Although he wanted Mikhail Gorbachev to replace him, the Central Committee elected Konstantin Chernenko, one of the last from the older generation of political leaders, to replace Andropov after his death. Chernenko focused on economics, dying after only thirteen months in office. After Chernenko’s death in 1985 the Central Committee elected Gorbachev, the first Soviet leader to be born after the October Revolution. Gorbachev’s religious policies were similar to Stalin’s wartime policy in that Islam and the ROC were treated similarly with few marked differences, yet it also retained the repression of Khrushchev initially and the relaxation of Brezhnev toward the end of his tenure. For this chapter, Islam and the ROC will be treated side-by-side to better highlight the similarities in Gorbachev’s remarkably fluid religious policy and to see how policy enforcement toward both religions impacted each other.

The Road Toward Religious Freedom

During the first eighteen months of Gorbachev’s tenure nothing truly changed. He continued to employ the indirect policies Brezhnev had adopted in the early 1980s, when increased persecution had been the order of the day. Gorbachev expressed his endorsement of the indirect methods employed by Brezhnev to the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in February 1986. “The party will use all forms of ideological influence for the wider propagation of a scientific understanding of the world, for the overcoming of religious prejudices without permitting any violation of believer’s feelings.” By focusing on scientific atheism instead of direct attacks on religion he hoped to maintain the status quo so that he could focus on economic

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273 Corley, Religion, 289.
reform. Since the reversal of the country’s economic situation was the primary task in Gorbachev’s mind, he did not devote much effort to defending his indirect policy. The Central Committee’s Secretary for Cadres and Ideological Affairs, Yegor Ligachev, wanted a highly-discriminatory atheist campaign similar to Khrushchev’s. While Gorbachev did not agree with Legachev’s idea, he would allow Ligachev’s more direct approach to influence religious policy in late 1986 and early 1987.\(^{275}\)

According to Anderson, Gorbachev wanted an attack on religion that was specifically against the localized influence of religion and not on religion itself, for he seemed to sincerely desire to uphold the Constitution. The influence of religion in stirring anti-Soviet feelings was the only aspect of religion that interfered with his reform policies and political control. When the concept of national identity was added to the mix the result was a religious policy that primarily affected the Christian areas, which coincidentally were also the ethnic-Russian areas, before it did the Muslim areas, the majority of which were non-Russian in ethnic composition.\(^{276}\)

Haghayegh agrees with Anderson and also emphasizes the delay in the liberalization of religious policy for the Muslim republics. He explicates two main reasons why this was the case. Firstly, Islam was viewed as a major obstacle for Gorbachev’s reforms because of its place in Muslim national identity and political ideology. After observing what Gorbachev considered to be the overly-tolerant religious conditions in Tashkent in November 1986, he gave an impromptu speech criticizing the local officials for their lax treatment of religion. He saw the hesitance of these local officials to carry out state reform as stemming from their own national Muslim identity. The Ministry of Education was ordered to investigate why atheist educational propaganda had failed to make a deeper impact in Muslim areas and to accordingly intensify atheist endeavors in Muslim republics. Secondly, Gorbachev declared that year that Islam was fundamentally incompatible with socialism. This proclamation resulted in slower progress for liberalization advances in Islamic policy as compared with the ROC.\(^{277}\)

Even before this impromptu November speech an unpublished decree in August 1986 called for an intensification of atheist propaganda against Islam. While a continuation in Brezhnev’s emphasis on scientific atheism prevailed in propaganda aimed at the ROC,

\(^{277}\) Haghayegh, *Islam*, 55.
Gorbachev began replacing those Muslim officials who were advocates of nationalism in what became a great purge of the Muslim republics’ Central Committees. The results of the purge were extreme in those republics where nationalism was more prevalent; in Uzbekistan half of the Party was replaced, whereas in Kirghizstan eighty-two percent of the party was replaced.\footnote{Ray Takeyh and Nikolas K. Gvosdev, 2004, \textit{The receding shadow of the prophet the rise and fall of radical political Islam} (Westport, Conn: Praeger), 114. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=127952.} In late 1986 riots began to break out across Central Asia, a direct result of the Party purges. The state was not initially sure if they were nationalist or religious in nature, for ethnic Russians had replaced several officials in areas of high anti-Russian sentiment. Regardless of the state’s uncertainty of their origins, it moved quickly to accuse those reactionary forces who wanted the Soviet Union overthrown of instigating the riots. The regime reacted quickly and harshly to restore control.\footnote{Alexandre Bennigsen, “Unrest in the World of Soviet Islam,” \textit{Third World Quarterly} 10, No. 2 (April 1988), 782.}

In the severe repression following the riots the Muslim peoples proved their willingness to meet force with force, threatening the Russians who tried to suppress them. Official confrontations with rioters became so escalated that several officials suggested giving them concessions just to calm them down, including legalizing all of the illegal mosques that existed. Of course, even these suggestions considered the long-term goal of controlling and eventually eradicating Islam, an implied reasoning that the Muslim peoples noticed.\footnote{Ibid., 784.} Gorbachev denied these suggestions and instead allowed Ligachev’s demands to be implemented, an action that caused his religious policy to resemble the oppressive policies of Khrushchev. This anti-Islamic campaign would continue until late 1987, but despite the increased persecution Islam began to grow in popularity and practice in ways that the government could not hide or ignore.\footnote{Haghayegh, \textit{Islam}, 57.}

In early 1987 Gorbachev began hesitantly revealing plans for broader democratization of political and cultural life in the USSR. At that time he released a third of all religious prisoners and began registering religious organizations in small numbers. Unfortunately Ligachev, who was finally getting his way with the state’s religious policies, immediately attacked Gorbachev’s liberal actions. For example, Gorbachev gave permission for parts of the Easter liturgy to be
broadcasted live on television. Once Ligachev found out about it, he called the station and cancelled the broadcast with ten minutes left before it aired. Planned coverage for the Millennium Celebration, the upcoming celebration of the Christianization of Kievan Rus’ on July 28, 988 A.D., was favorable for the Church, and religion across the board began receiving encouraging mentions in the press while an increasing number of articles in journals and newspapers began speaking out against the religious abuses the regime had undertaken.\textsuperscript{282} Aleksander Nezhny, a correspondent for \textit{Moscow News} and the foremost journalist who detailed abuses against religion, wrote articles about specific instances of abuse to raise popular support for religion throughout late 1986 and early 1987. Throughout 1987 other writers began writing more broadly about abuse and began claiming that atheists and believers could get along. They spread stories across the nation of how truly widespread the abuse was.\textsuperscript{283}

In September 1987 future Patriarch Aleksii II (he was elected Patriarch in 1990) gave an interview that explicitly stated the problems of an atheist state writing atheist legislation. “It is sad when sometimes at local level, and running counter to the basic principles of socialism… believers are treated with a certain suspicion… When atheist articles are written in an unfriendly tone and give quite unreliable information, this does not contribute to the creation of a healthy atmosphere for dialogue.” In this interview he also criticized certain aspects of the 1929 law “On Religious Associations” that he argued was irrelevant for the political situation at that time.\textsuperscript{284} His interview helped other religious leaders find the confidence to publicly criticize the state as well, but all in an effort to promote dialogue between church and state on common problems. When Gorbachev initially proposed the idea of \textit{glasnost} he had a plan for its usage. He had envisioned discussion that would help refine his plans of reform to accomplish what the people desired, as well as what the state desired. Instead of this mutually beneficial approach occurring as he had planned, \textit{glasnost} began taking on a life of its own as people began discussing religious and other cultural reforms. While these comments revealed the extent of public desire for religious reform, which his government immediately began planning, it did not ultimately accomplish what he desired.\textsuperscript{285}

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\item[\textsuperscript{282}] Anderson, \textit{Religion}, 139.
\item[\textsuperscript{283}] Ibid., 146-147.
\item[\textsuperscript{284}] Ibid., 149.
\item[\textsuperscript{285}] Takeyh, \textit{The Receding Shadow}, 115.
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At this time policy toward Islam was still strict in interpretation, desperately trying to prevent what seemed like an inevitable occurrence: the politicization of Islam in Central Asia, like that of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As anti-Russian sentiment and contempt for Muslim suppression was on the rise, Islam continued to shift in significance from the passive performance of ritual to the aggressive call for national unity, a concern that Brezhnev had tried to prevent eight years earlier. The Soviet officials denounced this movement towards politicization and called it Wahhabism, a type of Islam they believed to be simultaneously reactionary, nationalistic, and political in nature.\textsuperscript{286} As the possibility of a nationalist-Islamic revolt increasingly became more of a reality, public outcry against the state’s religious policy had spread to even atheists. In late 1987 V. I. Garadzha, the director of the Central Committee’s Institute of Scientific Atheism, published an article in which he claimed that the time had come to end religious persecution. He stressed that believers were citizens as much as non-believers and thought that atheists and believers could find commonalities with each other. This rhetoric would be borrowed by Gorbachev when he met Orthodox leaders in April 1988. Gorbachev saw that Soviet leaders were openly calling for changes in religious legislation alongside the Church and other religions. He realized several factors would necessarily figure into how he handled religious policy going into 1988.

Firstly, the conservatism displayed by Ligachev and other members of the Central Committee hindered his political and economic reform efforts. Gorbachev believed his political and economic reforms would not work unless accompanied by other cultural reforms, including those religious in nature. Secondly, he realized that a relaxation in religious persecution would meet the demands pushed by religious officials and help him gain the support of believers in carrying out his other reforms. Popular support had been on the decline because of the difficulties in the USSR’s overall economic situation, and the less criticism he received from religious leaders the easier it would be to get religious support for his other reforms. Thirdly, there was increased pressure from religious officials to change the 1929 law that determined

\textsuperscript{286} Bennigsen, “Unrest,” 779-780. This denouncement further illustrated the ignorance of the regime toward Islam. Though Brezhnev’s scholars had been the most well-educated up to that point, their knowledge was still generalized. Wahhabism is actually the dominant religion in Saudi Arabia, a sect of Islam that believes it is the only true version of Islam and which denounces all others. It calls for the strict adherence of believers to Muhammad’s original teachings, discounting later additions like traditional customs or the \textit{hadiths}, the supposed sayings of Muhammad written down by his followers decades after his death. This comment only further enraged the Soviet Muslim population.
religious policy. As the Millennium Celebration drew nearer Gorbachev understood how important the Church’s international contacts could be in lessening the impact of Western anti-Soviet propaganda.\textsuperscript{287} He realized that his recently publicized ideas concerning \textit{glasnost} (openness) and \textit{perestroika} (restructuring) would be necessary in allowing his reforms to prosper, and so he took the necessary steps to ensure his reforms’ future. The overthrow of Ligachev’s conservative faction within the Central Committee began the official liberalization stage of his religious policy.

Gorbachev discovered a plot to overthrow his regime that Ligachev had instigated, providing the perfect opportunity to demote the conservative officials out of the Central Committee. By March 1988 Gorbachev published his official liberalization policy in \textit{Kommunist} magazine. Possible revisions for “On Religious Associations” had already been discussed before 1988, some historians arguing since the early 1980s. The major areas of dissent concerning the laws on freedom of conscience involved the juridical personality of religious institutions, the implicit inequality between believers and nonbelievers in Article 52 of the 1977 Constitution, and the state’s extremely narrow interpretation of the 1929 “On Religious Associations” that greatly restricted the freedom to worship. Konstantin Kharchev, a man with no religious experience, had replaced Kuroedov as the CRA chairman in 1984. In his early interviews he stressed the state belief that the current religious legislation was fine but needed perfecting through better control of local officials. By 1987, however, he had become a leading reformer in the religious sphere.\textsuperscript{288} In a June 1987 meeting of the RSFSR CRA, he expressed his belief that religious organizations should automatically be registered with the state unless they had broken laws.\textsuperscript{289}

\textbf{A New Freedom of Conscience Law}

Kharchev was not the only non-believer complaining about religious legislation. Other CRA officials, writers, jurists, and dissidents had also argued for its improvement in the previous years, so that before April 1988 several provisions had already been formulated, such as granting the right of juridical personality to religious communities, permission for church involvement in

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\item \textsuperscript{287} Haghayegh, \textit{Islam}, 58-60.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Anderson, \textit{Religion}, 157.
\item \textsuperscript{289} Ibid., 158.
\end{itemize}
public life and charitable activity, additional rights on the religious education of children, and the possibility of an alternative to military service for conscientious objectors. Gorbachev called for a meeting with Patriarch Pimen (elected in 1971) and two other Orthodox leaders on April 29, 1988 in which he expressed his willingness to base state religious policy on cooperation. He stressed the commonalities between the state’s goals for the people and those of the Church and asked for support for this mutual endeavor, especially as the Millennium Celebration was approaching. More importantly, when Patriarch Pimen inquired into the possible revisions of “On Religious Associations” Gorbachev promised a completely new law on the freedom of conscience, an endeavor the state had secretly begun the year before:

The new law of freedom of conscience that is being drafted will reflect the real fruits of new approaches to state-church relations in conditions of perestroika and democratization of Soviet society… Believers are Soviet people, workers, patriots, and they have the full right to express their convictions with dignity. Perestroika, democratization and openness concern them as well—in full measure and without restrictions.

The Central Committee commissioned the CRA to draft a new freedom of conscience law in 1987, a request that the CRA forwarded to the Institute of State and Law of the USSR Academy of Sciences. This institute created a special commission for this purpose called the Public Scientific Consultative Commission attached to the Council for Religious Affairs. It was composed of representatives from the CRA, the KGB, the Procuracy, and the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, and Foreign Affairs. The religious leaders themselves, while consulted often, were not included on this commission. The ultimate goal of the commission was to update the 1929 “On Religious Associations” to meet the standards of the 1977 Constitution, the statutes of international organizations to which the USSR belonged (like the United Nations), and the current times. The official draft was completed by the end of 1988, and in February 1989 the commission held a meeting at which religious leaders were introduced to the draft legislation. At

291 Anderson, Religion, 140.
292 Haghayegh, Islam, 63.
293 Anderson, Religion, 159.
the same time a commentary of the draft written by lawyer Yury Rozenbaum was published in the legal journal *Sovetskoe gosurdarstvo i pravo* for public discussion.294

The changes showed a relaxation in the state requirements for legal church activity. Registration was reworked in the believers’ favor, for example. The registering body of the church only needed ten people (as opposed to the twenty needed previously), the state was given a timeline of one month to respond to a registration request, and if they were denied the registering body could appeal to the CRA. Charitable activities were once again allowed, as was the religious education for adults “at home or in the religious center,” the religious education of children according to the convictions of the parents, and the performance of religious rites in private homes, hospitals, and places of correction. The draft law was not entirely complete, however, and purposefully left fairly vague to allow future state policy changes. For instance, the draft said nothing about whether the religious rites performed outside of the religious building had to be performed by legal clergy of registered organizations or if unregistered clergy could be called as well.295 The religious leaders were encouraged by how much the draft had improved from the original freedom of conscience law, though its ambiguity disconcerted them. The process of appealing to the CRA in case of denied registration did not appease the clergy either, for it was the CRA who had abused its authority in the past.

The religious leaders wrote points in the margins that they felt should be emphasized. Types of criticism they offered enabled religious organizations to have greater security in their freedoms, including allowing the registering body of a church to appeal to the courts instead of the CRA, giving religious organizations the same rights as other social organizations, and allowing children to participate in religious life instead of solely education. Even controversial demands were submitted on the draft, such as returning all of the church property and possessions confiscated since 1917.296 The drafts submitted by the ROC were never published, and the legal copy of the draft created by the commission “disappeared” for over a year. It was finally passed on October 9, 1990, entitled “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.”

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294 Ibid., 160.
295 Ibid.
296 Ibid., 161.
Many of these concessions were informally awarded to the Church beginning in 1988 when Gorbachev published his liberalization plan. The relaxation in policy reached its height by the Millennium Celebration, though the state had begun planning for it even as early as 1982. This planning had not initially occurred in anticipation for the Celebration, but instead came about as the result of political aims. In a 1982 letter to the Central Committee Kuroedov explained that the ROC had run out of bibles, a situation “being commented on in a tendentious way by western anti-soviet propaganda.” Kuroedov remarked in this letter that “Publishing the Bible in the run-up to the 1,000th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in Rus will be an effective argument for the bankruptcy of the hostile propaganda about the oppression of the church in the USSR.”297 In 1983 the state returned the St. Danilov Monastery to the Patriarch, which the ROC made its official headquarters. In a 1987 interview, Patriarch Pimen revealed that churches were being restored to their former glory, sacred and devotional items were being made, and certain ascetics in the ROC’s history were being canonized, all in preparation for the Celebration. He also revealed that the CRA was actively assisting in the preparations.298

After 1986, when the task of preparing for the Millennium Celebration was more pressing in the Soviet agenda, the state began investigating different aspects of the Celebration and made moves to exert control over what foreigners would be able to witness and experience. In June 1987 the Committee for Foreign Tourism of Yaroslavl was ordered to prepare for guided tours of working services in churches. In addition to determining “possible quotas” for the visiting of several churches in Yaroslavl and Rostov and the days and times of these services, this committee was asked “to discuss the possibility of organizing priests’ duties at the time of the foreign citizens’ visit on the days when the churches are most frequented by believers.”299 As Corley notes in his commentary of this document, “Such tours were designed to prevent the tourists from having time to talk to the priests or the people and were conducted under close supervision from Intourist guides. Thus foreigners would leave with favourable impressions.

which would, it was hoped, help to counter the image of the Soviet state as a persecutor of religious groups.”

The state’s participation in the Celebration’s preparation seemed largely for reasons concerning international relations. House remarks that the release of the religious prisoners in early 1987 was surely allowed to “add verisimilitude to speeches about glasnost and détente.”

The possibility of the Church utilizing its own international connections played a factor, for the Church could easily complain to them if the state refused such an important celebration in the Church’s history. The state provided several facilities for Church use including the famous Bolshoi Theater, which was generally reserved for important state events, as a show of support that easily doubled as pro-Soviet propaganda. Positive radio and television coverage of the Celebration was also explained as pro-Soviet propaganda in the West, even though it also facilitated the outreach of the Church. The state’s generosity was fueled by more than solely international image concerns, however. The inevitable mass influx of foreign currency associated with the spike in tourism for the Celebration certainly factored into the state’s decision as well.

While Christian believers were enjoying a significant decrease in religious persecution by the time of the Millennium Celebration and throughout it Islam, did not begin receiving similar concessions from the state until a year after the Celebration. What concessions Islam did receive only occurred because of the active protestations of Islamic leaders. In December of 1988 student protests had erupted in Tashkent over the restoration of Uzbek as the official language and culture, though these students also recited readings from the Qur’an and waved green flags, which traditionally symbolized Islam. In an interview held immediately after his election to the office of Mufti of the Religious Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Muhammad Sadiq Mamayusupov expressed the Muslim peoples’ desire to have the same freedoms that the Christians enjoyed in the USSR. “At first, Muslims were rather passive and did not react quickly to what was happening elsewhere in the country. Now we are demanding the same privileges

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300 Corley, Religion, 330.
301 House, Millennium, 104.
302 Haghayegh, Islam, 63.
303 House, Millennium, 104.
304 Haghayegh, Islam, 66.
accorded to other religions. For Moscow the assertion of Muslim power first on ethnic and then on religious grounds is a challenge to reckon with.”

By the time the new law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” had been published, Pravda announced that the number of mosques in the USSR had doubled since 1985, reaching an all-time high of 751 mosques. The number of Islamic organization registrations had gone from 392 in 1985 to 1,103 in 1990, making it the third fastest growing religion after the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches. Muslim clergymen began running for political offices and were actually being elected, the first in Central Asia being Muhammad Yusuf in the Congress of the People’s Deputies in 1989. For the first time in decades the state’s policy toward the ROC and Islam were lined up, though this did not come about until right before the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev’s religious policy incorporated elements from all of those who came before him. Firstly, he sincerely wanted to defend the rights of believers while still maintaining control of religion, a policy similar to Lenin. The creation of a new freedom of conscience law exemplifies this policy clearly. He reworked 1929 “On Religious Associations” to line up closer with the 1977 Constitution, which allowed him to further define control over religion and provide for the rights of believers at the same time. Secondly, he granted concessions to further the state’s image and power like Stalin had done. Thirdly, he resorted to tactics so harsh that believers and atheists alike complained at its harshness like Khrushchev. Lastly, he began to loosen up his religious policy to improve relations with the West, like Brezhnev had. Though Brezhnev had relaxed in his Islam policy to improve relations with the Middle East, Gorbachev’s policy was similar in that he improved his treatment toward the ROC to impress Western tourists for the Millennium Celebration. His policies were similar to those before him because the same factors that had influenced former leaders still influenced him: his personal views on religion and the power and image of the state. Yet each of these leaders formed their own policies because of how the leader before them had handled religion. So did Gorbachev continue an overall Soviet religious policy, or did he create and implement his own? The next chapter argues that the latter was true for each leader.

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306 Haghayegh, Islam, 68.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Each leader had different forces acting upon his decisions, in each case shaping his reactions toward religion. Lenin wanted to destroy the leadership of the various religions so that the people could be freed from their oppressive influence. He did not want to harm the believers themselves, for each believer was a citizen of the Soviet Union who had been misled by religion. His actions show this trend, for he heavily persecuted religious leaders while not creating any real legislation to persecute believers. He also made abundantly clear that he was against harming the religious sensibilities of believers, both because actions of that type could cross over into harming the believer and because persecution tended to drive believers toward their religion instead of away from it. Lenin also focused more on condemning counter-revolutionaries and anti-communist dissenters than on religion, and attempted to replace religious ideology with the truth of communism. The double standard technique of politics in which the official ideology of the state and the actions of the government did not line up was created by Lenin when he developed in practice his own version of the socialism that the state claimed to follow. His policy applied to both the ROC and Islam, but it took a few years for various reasons until he could begin implementing it in Muslim countries.

Stalin took Lenin’s ideas and intensified them. He also focused on the clergy, but broadened his religious persecution to include religious believers as well. He believed in a more direct use of propaganda and force that did Lenin. He also actively sought to overthrow religion’s hold on the people through the use of direct interference in religious affairs and through trying to scare believers into submission. Stalin’s Committee to Establish Separation of Church and State was heavily employed in this area of policy, for it was responsible for creating new legislation and governing policy for several years. This committee perfectly exemplifies the double standard approach begun by Lenin and furthered by Stalin. Stalin handled many matters outside of the law through practicing a loose interpretation of legislation and creating his own. Once war came to the Soviet Union Stalin was forced by the circumstances to accept the help of religious organizations, creating a system of abrogation in religious policy for support of the state. Stalin’s policy toward Islam closely paralleled his policy toward the ROC because of the
failure of his First Five-Year Plan, the surprising strength of religion revealed in the 1937 census, and the threat of war.

Khrushchev did not like how lax Stalin had become toward religion at the end of his tenure and stepped up persecution to compensate. In the end, however, he ended up utilizing the same “concessions for support” system created by Stalin to advance the image and influence of the USSR abroad. He focused rather heavily in propaganda and increased the production of propaganda in all areas; he also used excessive force to exert his will over religion. The increased persecution did not result in the eradication of religion as hoped, and instead caused the proliferation of the underground church. Khrushchev began reaching out to the Middle East more and more, employing the Muslim clergy to advocate on behalf of the state. The inefficiency of Khrushchev’s persecution caused many to turn away from Soviet ideology, however, and many also began questioning the purpose of the anti-religious campaign.

Brezhnev would have to deal with the intelligentsia who posed these difficult questions. He immediately lessened the religious persecution begun by Khrushchev and essentially aimed his policy around fixing what he perceived to be the errors in Khrushchev’s policy. He also stressed propaganda, but toward the creation of the ideal Soviet man as well as against religion. Anti-religious publications increased, anti-religious legislation was updated, and scientific atheist education proliferated. While Brezhnev succeeded in indirect persecution instead of the direct persecution employed by Khrushchev, he failed miserably to create a definite stance or direction for the future of Soviet religious policy. His indecision became increasingly apparent as the end of his tenure approached. Brezhnev took the beginnings of Khrushchev’s Middle East endeavors and expanded them until the Soviet Union maintained friendly relations with Muslim countries. When he invaded Afghanistan to advance Soviet power, all of his international gains with Muslim countries were lost and increased persecution of Soviet Muslims built in intensity once again to combat the influence of the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

Gorbachev continued to increase religious persecution overall when he came to office. His religious policy included different aspects of the policies of those who came before him. Firstly, he adopted Lenin’s genuine attempts to defend the rights of believers while simultaneously persecuting religion itself. His eventual creation of a new freedom of conscience law exemplifies this policy clearly. Secondly, he liberally interpreted existing religious legislation so as to bribe religious officials into furthering the state’s image and power like Stalin
had done. Printing more Bibles, assisting in the Millennium Celebration preparations, and restoring certain churches to the ROC are examples of how his relations with the ROC were geared toward improving the state’s international image. Thirdly, he utilized tactics so harsh that atheists and believers alike complained at its harshness, similar to the actions of Khrushchev. Lastly, he began to relax his religious policy to improve relations with the West, like Brezhnev had. Though Brezhnev had downplayed Islam persecution to improve relations with the Middle East, Gorbachev’s policy was similar in that he improved his treatment toward the ROC to impress Western tourists for the Millennium Celebration.

Each of these leaders clearly saw the solution to the religious problem in a different light and implemented differing strategies to further their goals. No one area for each of these leaders could be said to constitute the “Soviet religious policy.” Yet the majority of scholarly literature on the subject of Soviet religious policy identifies and explains an actual policy created by the state to destroy religion. The view of Anderson in *Religion, state and politics in the Soviet Union and successor states* on policy is a general summation of how the majority of historians treat the subject of Soviet religious policies. Broadly defined, Anderson claims that policy can be any action undertaken by a state toward a subject.

Policy can be used to describe a broad political programme or it might be applied to a one-off decision; to a simple proposal, or to what actually happens at the end of the day which might in turn bear little resemblance to the wishes of the ‘policy maker.’ Policy might refer to major initiatives and changes—such as those initiated in the religious field by Khrushchev of Gorbachev; might refer to a more instrumental fine tuning of existing practice—as under Brezhnev; or even to a period of drift where the state largely abdicates responsibility for decision making in particular fields. According to him, policy is more than the methodological actions of a government: he believes that policy equally applies to decisions based on a plan, practical action regardless of a plan, or the lack of a plan in thought and deed. As this definition is remarkably broad, he specifies what he believes policy to mean for the Soviet Union:

Using these sources it is possible to suggest that religious policy up until the late 1980s comprised three main elements: a socialization process aimed at the creation of the new Soviet (atheist) man; the administrative and legislative regulation of religious bodies with

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the ostensible intention of eventually seeing them disappear; coping with the responses of believers to official policies, if necessary by repressive.\textsuperscript{308}

He further explains in his introduction that policy was a flexible affair subordinate to the effort of building socialism as defined by Lenin. It was necessarily in constant flux and underwent successive amendment because policy in its definition in a process.\textsuperscript{309} Bociurkiw agrees with Anderson’s interpretation of policy but takes it a step farther.

From 1922 on, following its victory in the last open church-state battle (over the confiscation of church valuables), the Bolshevik regime in fact introduced an unwritten but crucially important innovation into its doctrine of church-state relations. Henceforth, the right to enjoy a narrowly circumscribed freedom of religious worship was to be limited to religious groups which had supplied positive proofs of their loyalty to the Soviet state… This line, which with some important variations has been pursued ever since by the Soviet regime, has had momentous consequences for the future of organized religion in the USSR.\textsuperscript{310}

In addition to a policy of wide variation, constant amendment, and arbitrary whim, the Soviet state also followed or forgot its policy depending on the perceived loyalty of religious groups to the state. This is beginning to sound like a complete absence of policy more than a working religious policy, a reaction-oriented sentiment toward religion instead of a method of control over it. I disagree with this view of policy, even if parts of it have merit.

I would suggest a policy foundation from which a discernible Soviet religious policy arises. Charles Frankel, an American philosopher who also wrote about foreign policy and religion, provides a suitable view on what a policy should be. “Whatever a government may decide to adopt on paper as its policy, what it actually does is controlled and limited by the style and habits, the resources and the scale of values, of the society which it asks to support and implement that policy.” Frankel’s observation about policy seems like the above definitions, but upon further examination it is obvious that his idea is completely different. He is stating that the written policy is only implemented as closely as the society in which it is implemented allows

\textsuperscript{308} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{309} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{310} Bociurkiw, “Church-State Relations,” 83-84.
it. Frankel is discussing foreign policy, hence his using the word ‘ask,’ but it could apply to religion in the Soviet Union as well. No matter what was written down as policy, the responses of the people determined what the government did. Stalin wanted to continue and increase religious persecution before World War II began, Brezhnev wanted to befriend the Muslim nations of the Middle East, and Gorbachev wanted to further political and economic reforms through a slight relaxation in religious persecution; what actually occurred in all of these instances was contrary to the intentions of the state because of the people’s actions.

In Frankel’s view, any type of policy must have three conditions fulfilled: Firstly, policy must have a transnational flavor, meaning applicability beyond the borders of its country of origin and an element of universality. Secondly, policy must be receptive of the views held by the people among whom the policy is being applied, meaning that the government advocating the policy must be open to receiving input and advice in addition to merely applying policy. Thirdly, policy must be consistent, meaning that it must have a regular set of guidelines that are not subject to drastic change unless there are strong reasons, and must also possess identifiable goals. The first condition is proven false in the Soviet state’s policies toward religion. Khrushchev and Brezhnev treated the Muslim countries of the Middle East completely differently than they did the Soviet Muslims. While Khrushchev respected the political sovereignty and beliefs of Middle Eastern leaders (especially Nasser), he severely persecuted and took away the rights of Muslims within the USSR. Similarly, Brezhnev extolled the progressive, revolutionary nature of Islam and quickly moved to befriend Middle Eastern countries while also denouncing Islam at home. Also, all of the Soviet leaders except for Lenin utilized the international relations that the ROC possessed to spread pro-Soviet propaganda and false information about the state of religion in the USSR while doing all they could to persecute the Church’s clergy and laymen.

The second condition makes sense if the goal of any policy is considered. It should be the state’s plan of actions towards religion, certainly, but it is also manageable in that the people agree to submit themselves to it. This condition is absolutely proven false by the actions of each Soviet leader in their views. As far as Islam is concerned, only Lenin allowed the Muslim clergy

312 Ibid., 142-143.
to have a say in how their religion was regulated when he allowed Muslims to advocate on the state’s behalf and serve in some government positions. A large percentage of Muslims completely agreed with Soviet rule and enthusiastically supported the Soviet government’s rise to power. The state’s disavowal of Islam proved the only barrier that prevented the state from having a completely harmonious relationship with most Soviet Muslims. All other Soviet leaders completely disregarded the arguments and beliefs of Soviet Muslims.

When the ROC is considered the second condition becomes more complex. Initially, the Church completely disavowed the beliefs of the new government. In this situation the Soviet government could not have held any policy that would have been agreeable to the Church except to allow not only its existence but also its dominance in Soviet life and politics. Nonetheless, a compromise could have been reached and some of the demands of the ROC could have been met in a way that the Church would have supported the state’s existence. The state instead chose to create a plan of action in complete opposition to the wishes of the Orthodox believers. According to Frankel’s definition, this is the opposite what a policy should be.

The third condition seems attainable, for it could be argued that the religious laws were a regular set of guidelines. It could also be argued that almost all of the times where these laws were changed were times of great need. Yet the practice and substance of religious policy changed with each leader, and the level of adherence to the law varied with each leader as well. The Soviet state therefore fails at each of the three points, meaning that the state could not have had a uniform policy that it advocated over the tenures of several leaders, an official state policy that survived through time. Even the individual “policies” of each leader fail to fit the three conditions. Instead of each leader having a set religious policy, they chose to have a “stance” or an outlook that determined how they would react to religion. But is that not the definition of policy?

The word “policy” has several definitions, as the Merriam-Webster dictionary readily explains. The historiography of Soviet religious policy uses the definition of “a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body.” As I do not believe there to be an overarching plan, I am opting for a different definition that allows for the flexibility seen in each Soviet leader’s tenure. The Soviet-style of policy is “a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given
conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions.” This definition better fits the Soviet leadership style for several reasons. Firstly, each decision made by each leader was chosen from several offered viewpoints, as the state of Brezhnev’s administration aptly reveals. Secondly, the circumstances surrounding each decision played a significant role in what decision each leader reached. Of the different leaders, Gorbachev’s political circumstances illustrate this. Thirdly, this definition easily allows for the changes that each leader imposed on it. The actions of the Soviet government throughout time do not exemplify any “general goal” that the state may have had, for even Khrushchev was willing to utilize religion to accomplish his international goals instead of avidly seeking its destruction, nor was there any set “acceptable procedure” outlined for its implementation. Each leader instead conducted his own affairs as he saw fit.

At the beginning of the thesis I explained that two considerations were constant in religious policies: the vacillating temperaments and goals of each leader and the need to protect the power and image of the state. Many historians have argued that ideology was the main factor that determined religious policy, for the Leninist approach to socialism called for the destruction of religion. I argue that the actions of the state proved otherwise. Leninist-socialism may have been used as the reason (or more accurately, the excuse) for religious persecution in official declarations, but the private motivations of each leader only stemmed partially from it. Firstly, each leader had his personal goals and ideas. Lenin wanted to spread his beliefs; Stalin wanted to destroy all who believed in religion, but his desire to save his nation trumped it; Khrushchev wanted to expand Soviet influence into the Middle East and finalize state control over religion so it could be utilized to advance state goals; Brezhnev wanted to create the new Soviet man, attempting to win over believers to this ideal through relaxed persecution; and Gorbachev wanted to reduce persecution so that larger political and economic reforms could prosper. These actions do not sound like they were motivated by a desire to end religion no matter what the situation, for these leaders often took a backward step in religious persecution to accomplish their own goals.

Secondly, many religious decisions were made to protect or spread state power and the state’s image. In fact, there are several instances when a Soviet leader chose to ignore the state’s official ideology concerning religion to further the power or image of the state, showing this influence’s greater role in determining religious policy. Lenin oppressed the clergy to

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consolidate the state’s power over individuals in Soviet society, Stalin forced religious officials to proclaim internationally that complete religious freedom existed within the Soviet Union, Khrushchev used religious officials to spread Soviet influence, Brezhnev used clergy to improve the Soviet image in the Middle East, and Gorbachev provided concessions to religion to improve the Soviets’ image internationally. The power, prestige, and influence of the Soviet state mattered more to Soviet leaders because the state could attain these goals easily, while the goal to communism seemed increasingly farther away. This shows the importance of practical goals over the ideal of full-blown communism as emphasized in Soviet ideology.

The implications of a Soviet government whose goal is not the attainment of communism but rather his personal goals are astounding. If none of these leaders, outside of Lenin, ever fully committed to enforcing the supposed Leninist-socialist ideology of the state and instead pursued their own religious policies, then the Soviet government was not truly socialist—at least when religion was concerned. The fight against religion may have begun with a close implementation of socialism by the man who created its Soviet deviation, but for the rest of Soviet history the state chose to ignore this theoretical policy or overpower it with personal goals. If this conclusion is correct, then each legislative, political, or religious policy decision after Lenin had a motivation of more importance than Soviet ideology, making Soviet religious policies Soviet only because the governmental leaders professed that title.

While I have focused on the Russian Orthodox Church as an example for a national religion in comparison to the foreign religion of Islam, there were, and still are, other national orthodox churches in countries like Georgia, Ukraine, Estonia, and Latvia. Their fates were different from the ROC in two main ways. Firstly, these national churches were persecuted by the ROC in addition to the Soviet state. The ROC never wanted the autocephaly of the national orthodox churches because these churches had sought to undermine the ROC’s influence at the beginning of Soviet rule, especially the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Church also saw any subdivision of the orthodox faith as a hindrance in creating a united Christian front against the Soviet state. Secondly, the establishment of complete ecclesiastical independence, thereby creating an autocephalous national religion, was tied into nationalist policy for each nation. They saw the establishment of their own orthodox church as a necessary requirement in attaining national independence. Since the ROC had acquired official recognition centuries earlier it

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Kolarz, Religion, 96.
merely sought to defend itself from Communist influence, but these smaller nations had made their defense of religion a political goal that Kolarz explains was higher than religion itself: “It would be true to say that autocephaly has even become a nationalist obsession; to many people the autocephalous status of their Church became more important than the Church itself.”

These Orthodox churches rebelled against the Soviet state in the same manner as the ROC, but they also sought the long-term goal of national independence. The state initially granted these national churches autocephalous status, for the Bolsheviks did not differentiate between different religions in their theology. Since each leader’s religious policies that concerned Orthodox Christianity were aimed specifically at the ROC, these national churches had to deal with policies that were not created for them. For instance, any legislation resulting from the state’s fight with the Russian Orthodox Patriarch was applied to the national orthodox churches despite the fact that they claimed to be independent from the ROC Patriarch’s authority and activities. Outside of this frustration for the other national orthodox churches, the intensity and development of anti-religious propaganda in each nation with its own orthodox church was applied the same as it was in Russia.

Though I have written about religious policy during the Soviet Union’s tenure, the ROC and Islam changed in several ways after the Soviet Union’s collapse because of the policies that had been in place during its rule. Reform movements sprang up in both religions to address a number of issues. Firstly, the compromises that religious leaders endured under the Soviets were attacked by religious activists. Secondly, the relationships between both religions’ clergy and the Soviet state, especially the KGB, were brought out in the open and used to call for new leadership. Anderson argues that the inter-religious conflicts that would have normally occurred in a free state were almost non-existent as the Soviets repressed all religion, but as soon as that repression was lifted the various religious groups in the former Soviet Union began fighting each other once again. This was especially evident in the ROC’s fight to establish hegemony over the other national orthodox churches. The new governments created after the

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315 Ibid.
316 Ibid., 99.
318 Ibid., 186-192.
collapse had to figure out how to treat religion at the same time that religious leaders had to learn to regulate themselves.\textsuperscript{319}

As this thesis has hopefully revealed, Soviet religious policy was not merely a policy of repressing religion. In fact, the majority of religious policy decisions did not even stem from the ideological fight against it but rather from other state political, economic, or strategy concerns. This fact is further supported by the diverse policies created and shaped by each Soviet leader. As historians continue to piece together the various influences on Soviet policy making, they may discover that the state ignored Soviet ideology in other areas. They may even discover that the state never truly implemented the ideology professed by Lenin in the first place, but merely used it as an excuse like they often did in their religious policies. As the unfocused picture of the Soviet history is brought into focus by the contributions of succeeding generations of Soviet historians, added information will refine our understanding of Soviet religious policies. Only then will the picture of religion in the Soviet Union be fully developed.

\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., 193.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Barry A. Childers was born on the island of Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands on February 9, 1988. Childers earned his Bachelor of Arts in History, Magna Cum Laude, in May 2010 from Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee and began working toward his Master of Arts (M.A.) in History at The Florida State University during the fall of 2010. Childers published one paper for the 2009 ACA-UNC History Colloquium entitled “Preconceived Notions: How the 1964 Flag Riots in Panama Changed America’s Flawed Policy with Panama.” For his M.A., Childers majored in Modern European History and minored in Middle Eastern History. While enjoying all historical research pursuits, having written papers throughout his college career on diverse topics, his primary research interest is Soviet History.