

The Evolution of Soviet State and Religion Interrelation (1920s – Early 1950s)

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Abstract. This article is devoted to the relationship between cults and the Soviet system. The author touches upon the complex and often tragic period of total escalation of forced pressure on members of religious cults. The author focuses on the legal foundations of the Soviet anti-religious policy, and highlights the issues of anti-religious state structures, revealing its repressive aim to abolish religion.

Keywords: religious cult; Islam; Orthodoxy; the Union of Militant Atheists; shariatists; atheistic five-year plan.

Introduction. The process of developing relationships between religious cults and state authorities and their evolution has been mixed, it can not be considered as static or satisfactory. Today, there is an undeniable need for an objective interpretation of anti-religious policy against religious cults in Kazakhstan in the Soviet epoch. The content is arranged in such a way as to highlight the issues of state policy aimed at the abolition of religious worship and to review the Union of Militant Atheists' activities.

Materials and methods. The main sources of this article were the documents of the President's Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (PA RK), Central State Archives (CSA), and State Archives of the East Kazakhstan Region (SAOTEKR). The use of specific historical methods enabled me to classify and arrange the source base. At the same time the problem-chronological method facilitated a disclosure of historical events in conjunction with the release of regional policies and its peculiarities aimed against religious cults.

Discussion. The Russian historical science has developed a significant range of researches in the analysis of state religious policy in 1920-1950s. In the 90s, there were investigations with outstanding new approaches in the evaluation of the state's religious policy. In particular, M.I. Odintsov traced the evolution of relations between the state and the Church [1]; and O.V. Vasilyeva discussed the roles and activities of the Militant Atheists' Union which destroyed moral and ethical foundations of the population [2]. A comprehensive theoretical and concrete historical analysis of the problems of implementation of the repressive policy towards religious cults was reflected in Y.N. Makarov's thesis [3], anti-clerical laws of repression aimed at the abolition of the church; and issues of historiography and Diplomacy are studied by N.A. Krivova [4].

Results. The problem of power retention was the main objective of the Bolshevik Party a decade after the October revolution. The Church openly condemned the armed Bolsheviks who came to power, and became the target for persecution. The policy of the Soviet leadership towards religion had a dual character: on the one hand, a declared freedom of conscience and an appropriate legal framework, on the other hand, prohibitive, restrictive and repressive measures towards the expressed political clichés.

The following point of view dominates in historical literature: the main objective of the new government was to abolish religious ideology. The first acts of the Soviet government, separating religion from the state and abolishing the privileges of church leaders were, "Decree on Land" and the "Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia", adopted by the II All-Russian Congress of Soviets in 1917. After that the transfer of church lands was legalized at the disposal of the Soviet regime. In December 1917, SNC (Council of People's Commissars) adopted a "Resolution of the upbringing and education transfer from the spiritual department to the People's Commissariat of Education."

The high number of Muslims and reluctance to lose national borders, as well as the weak positions of the Bolsheviks in the Muslim areas determined the flexibility and discretion in the implementation of the ideas of the new system. Too wide geographical expanses didn't allow establishing complete and total control over the Asian part of the country, which lived according to

their own laws. As part of the policy pursued towards Muslims, in 1917 the SNC decided to convene the Muslim Congress in Petrograd, where Muslim believers got back the "Holy Koran of Osman" which had been seized by the tsarist government.

In 1917 the People's Commissariat for Nationalities was created; the Muslim socialist commissariat was organized in its composition, whose departments were in the cities of Verniy and Semipalatinsk. In 1918 the Commissariat for Internal Muslims of Russia and Siberia, the Central Muslim Military Collegiums of the People's Commissariat for Military Affairs, and the Department of Muslims of the Middle East under the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs were founded. In the history of relations between the Islam cult and the state a so-called "Sharia Project" existed; containing 15 clarifications of Sharia regulations to follow the communist doctrine. The paper attempted to legitimize the new government with the reference to the Sharia, and to adapt Sharia to the new conditions. The "Soviet of shariatists" argued that communism and Sharia were not in conflict, and in 1921, were supported by the People's Commissar for Nationalities I. Stalin [5]. The People's Commissariat of Nationalities announced Friday as a holiday for employees of the Muslim socialist commissariat, and in 1919 the Kazakh Central Executive Committee authorized the celebration of Eid al-Meiram in Kazakhstan. It should be noted that in the period of 1937, the peak of mass repressions, 35 students of the Kazakh "Zhana Aul" village school stopped training for three days, and the farmers didn't go to work on the occasion of Kurban Ait [6].

Having adopted the decree "about the the separation of church and the state and the separation of church and the school system" in January 1918 the Soviet Union declared itself a secular state, and the religious society a private one, existing through donations of the faithful. Participation in the event of the separation of church and state and of the separation of church and the school system was mentioned in the report "about the work of the Ust-Kamenogorsk county-city police of Semipalatinsk province for the 4th reporting quarter from the 1st of July to the 1st of October, 1925". The "Decree of the Justice National Commissariat (JNC) of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) on August 24, 1918 "about the the separation of church and state and of the separation of church and the school system" was conducted in the county. Not all the requirements are followed exactly, in addition, recent orders concerning property registration were almost not followed, supervision over safety has taken place, the received directives of the center are not completely absorbed and interpreted differently. The school is separated from the church in the full sense of the word. There were no violations of regulations in this plane" [7]. The content of the document accurately reflected the situation around; every local leader followed to the best of his understanding, despite the extra circulars, the issued directives clarifying previous legislative instructions. Here or there were distortions in the policy for Muslims.

To implement the decree the VIII-th department (in liquidation) was founded at JNC of the Kazakh ASSR; I.M. Alekseev was appointed as the head of that department and G.M. Ibragimov as the secretary. The creation of the Antireligious Commission (ARC) became a fundamental factor in the realization of the liquidation of ideas in combating religious ideology in 1922. 1922 is special in the interrelation between religious cults and the state; it was called the "assassinater" by Russian historians, as during this period the forced removal of church property, and the elimination of church property took place.

The relationship between power and religion entered a phase of all-out escalation of force, pressing on a religious cult and its representatives. The evidence is anti-religious meetings of 1926 and 1929, the congresses of atheists in 1925 and 1929, as well as the tightening of legislation. The decisions of the Executive Committee and Sovnarkom (Soviet Public Committee) of the RSFSR "of Religious Associations" from April 8, 1929 (in operation until 1990), were particularly significant. In addition, on February 11, 1930 there was a decree of the CEC (Central Election Committee) and SNC "about combating the counter-revolutionary elements in the governing bodies of religious organizations," which authorized the search of persons hostile to the government, and allowed to refuse registration of religious groups, where they were observed. Peasant unrest commonly began that year; around the edge of the activated control of forced collectivization. The legislative and legal policy of the state created a system of strict religious organizations depending on the state administrative structures, which were not always guided by the center, and sometimes regionally to create their regional law, which met the general system of repressive state policy. On April 13, 1922 the State Political Department (SPD) of Kazakh SSR sent an answer by cipher telegram to the secretary of Semipalatinsk province with a security stamp, the guide of Commissions leadership, for the confiscation of church valuables. On May 5 the confiscating of the church property of St.

Nicholas Church began; St. Nicholas Church was built in 1899-1901. 69 silver objects of nearly three pounds weight were taken out [8].

As a result, 25 holy icons were stripped from St. Nicholas Church, all seized and stockpiled into boxes to be sent to the center without regard to their historical and artistic value. Through the purchase of the faithful the icon of St. Nicholas was saved. Items of religious ritual seized from the churches often had a historical, museum quality. Confiscation of church valuables happened in Znamenskiy Cathedral, built on August 15, 1777 on public charities. As a result of the commission all except two icons had been stripped: icons of Znamensk-Abalatskaya God, Mother, and the image of Christ icon "the King of Glory." The Commission did not simply withdraw, but virtually destroyed cultural treasures, such as ancient gospels of the XVIII and XIX centuries decorated with silver jewelry. Presumably, according to the Commission, in the Cathedral of the Sign about 49 objects of more than three pounds weight were removed [9]. Similar policies of seizure took place in all the Orthodox churches of the East area: Sabbath, All Saints, Alexander Nevsky and the other churches. The Commission stated that silver and gold jewelry were not found in the Muslim mosques.

From 1925, restrictions were placed in religious education. Now, religious teaching could only be carried out in mosques and by order of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the village population, a teacher of religion could only be a mullah, subject to mandatory registration and approval of the provincial administrative department and the Board of Education [10]. According to the official data on January 1, 1924 there were 19 schools with approximately 280 students in Kazakhstan, only 8 schools (i.e. registered) existed in Semipalatinsk province; and on January 1, 1925 there were 13 schools in the province [11]. In Kazakhstan muhtasibats and mutavalliats were founded. Muhtasibat – is a spiritual board that brings together communities of designation. It was led by a muhtasib, elected at the district convention of clergy and by two mushavirs - his advisers and aides - also elected. Administratively, mutavalliati was the center of the religious life of the village. Believers elected mullah muezzin and mutavalliati council, consisting of 3-5 people. According to Kazkrykoma (Kazakh Regional Committee) of EKP (b) by 1927 there were 55 muhtasibats in Kazakhstan, 8 of them in Semipalatinsk province [12].

On October 19, 1922 the government created the tools to deal with religion - "Anti-religious committee" (ARC) The uniqueness of this important public body lay in the fact that, firstly, its members included senior government ranks, secondly, the Commission was subject to the Politburo, and thirdly, it played a major role in determining the nature of religious-state relations and in the resolution of the acute problem questions. It implemented a nodal problem – the struggle with religion and its complete destruction. A similar commission was established in Kazakhstan. From 1929, the ARC in Kazakhstan was headed by S. Asfendiarov [13].

The content of KRC Bureau protocols shows that over-activation of the Muslim and Orthodox clergy concerned authorities that required regions to prevent the organization of the Muslim clergy, religious schools, and not to allow the teaching of any Muslim or Orthodox teaching. They strengthened the repressive policies against persons who violated Soviet law.

The "Atheist" newspaper created a society of friends of the newspaper (SFNA); "godless Soviet Union" was formed from it. On October 30, 1924 at the board meeting of Agitprop of the Russian Communist Party (RCP) (b) in Ust-Kamenogorsk was made a decision of the organization of the Society of Friends of the newspaper "Atheist", and then the creation of the society "Atheist" was made. In all major population centers similar organizations were established [14]. In October 1927 the Union of Atheists organizing bureau was created, and on July 12, 1928 1 the District Congress convened atheists in Semipalatinsk province [15]. In Kazakhstan, based on the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, opened in the same year, 1930, the "Union of Atheists of Kazakhstan" worked. The atheist section dealt with the preparation and distribution of educational materials among supervisors. Despite the steps taken by the Government to train activists, the cultural and educational level of many of them remained low, which affected the performance of SRB. In February 1935, the Museum of Religion and Atheism was opened in Kazakhstan, located in the former St. Nicholas Church. The museum opened a special section "Bucks - the main stages of the history of religion," "the class essence of Christianity" by name.

Komsomol organizations used their methods in the struggle against religion. Ust-Kamenogorsk district Komsomol committee wrote in the letter to volkoms: "This year (1925) the anti-religious campaign is led by the "Society Union of Atheists" where there are none, conducting it in club or hut-reading rooms. Komsomol cells must take an active part in this campaign, study the issue of "From icons to the barricades (the path of the fifth year revolution: from Bloody

Sunday to Moscow armed uprising); war to the old way of life (anti-religious rites, with the festive revelry, drunkenness). In any case not to ridicule religion and faith, it is desirable to organize natural science unions called "Komsomolsk Christmas", Easter, etc. The day of Christmas unions should help in evening parties, to perform the plays, sing and divert young people from drinking" [16].

In June 1929 the II country atheist Congress passed, it was the culmination of their work. In 1929, all of the departments of the Kazakhstan Militant Atheists Union received a letter from their authority of the need to intensify anti-religious propaganda, and to strengthen measures to combat religious cults [17].

Solutions of the XVII Party Conference in 1932 allowed modern historical science to introduce the concept of an "atheistic five-year plan." It was about the second five years, and its ambitious economic plans, the task of creating a classless society, the elimination of all vestiges of the social meant the complete destruction of religion by all available means and methods in the historical reality. Mass anti-religious hysteria that had swept the country, took place against the background of churches and mosques closing. In the "Soviet steppe" newspaper from November 24, 1929 it was stated: "The revolution has caused a deep wound to all religions. Now the cultural growth of the masses finally drives a stake through the grave of religion. Thousands of churches, synagogues, mosques and prayer houses are used as workers' cultural institutions. This movement is widely spread over the Union and our region. There are less and less religious fans" [18].

In the period of the Second Five-Year Plan there was the Stakhanovism division in the country, embracing all spheres of social and economic life, including the activities of SRB; it should be also noted that there was a secret plan to destroy religion generally. S. Firsov wrote: "By 1932-1933 all the churches, chapels, synagogues, and mosques have to be closed; by 1933-1934 all religious beliefs should disappear through the influence of literature and the family; by 1934-1935 the country, and above all, young people have to be covered with total anti-religious propaganda; by 1935-1936 the last houses of worship should disappear; and by 1936-1937 religion is required to be driven out of the most secluded corners" [19].

Areas, oblasts, autonomies competed, the contract of the quantitative performance of ISF were concluded. A bright illustrative example is the "Agreement on the socialist competition between the Republican Organization Bureau and the Council of the Kazakh SRB Tat. ASSR ", concluded on August 29, 1937. According to the obligations assumed as follows: the organization of the new departments of SRB bring their number into the Autonomous Republic up to 5000, in Tatarstan - till 1500, up to July 25, 1938 there would be 100,000 and 30,000 members. Next, to hold conferences, to listen to the ISF reports, to increase the number of part-time employees in the field up to 25 people and to collect membership fees of 150,000 rubles in KASSR and 45,000 rubles in Tatarstan [20]. Since 1937, after an infusion of financial activities of the ISF, work in all departments intensified, allowing KASSR to take the third place after Ukraine and Georgia [21].

In the anti-religious policy a Machiavellianism line was traced, aimed at splitting any religious cult that produced a group of "progressive clergy." By the mid-1920s, the church was turned into an absolutely upright organization, devoid of the former social and economic impact. The archives of State Achieve of East Kazakhstan Oblast (SAEKO) mention various groups of Orthodox believers, the first group includes the Orthodox who saved their century old faithful practice, they were called "old-clergy", the second group - Renovationists. Parish Council and the clergy of the independent Semipalatinsk Diocese recognizing Tikhon was founded with the resolution of the meeting. The Ust-Kamenogorsk city was named as the residence. Known province clerics, including B. Gerasimov were elected in the diocesan administration. According to the Semipalatinsk SPU Provost Serge replied at the request of the Tomsk tserkur: "Semipalatinsk Diocese accepts the old church governance and the creation of the new church is treated as an act of the Soviet authorities directed to decompose. Subsequently, members of the Diocesan Administration were repressed [22].

In 1926, the thesis of the anti-Soviet Muslim religion appeared in the official documents of the Kazakh authorities. The next year, not just anti-religious propaganda began, but also the question of the elimination of religion in general took place. The East department of the USPD (United State Political Department) OGPU was engaged in the Muslims split. To this aim Bashkiria State University was created in Ufa city, the same place where CSMD (Central Spiritual Muslim Department) acted, and a long and intense history of cooperation between USPD and CSMD began. The relevant bodies of the Soviet authorities skillfully used the situation of Islam repression in general, and by the end of the 1930s both departments suffered from great loss.

The end of the 1920s was marked with a large-scale offensive against religious groups; the central authorities failed to control the situation; the removal of religious buildings and even stopping religious worship was so quick that there was no time for the rule of law. It was enough to refuse registration and simple closure (non contract or tax evasion, etc) and sometimes it was not required, it was sufficient to initiate a "people's anger" and the question about the urgent need for a cultural institution. According to the Cults Central Standing Committee, during the first years of Soviet power there were 2500 places of worship in Kazakhstan. According to the information which the Commission submitted to the Government, in 1918-1931 1630 prayer houses were closed in the provinces, 782 of them were mosques; in 1931-1933 8 buildings of worship were closed, and 879 (including 499 mosques) continued functioning by the order of the Central Executive Committee [23].

79 religious buildings, including 57 churches, 10 mosques, 10 houses of worship, and two chapels were seized in Semipalatinsk district in 1929. Prior to 1917, there were 12 mosques in Semipalatinsk [24].

With this activity, prayer houses, which had cultural and historical value disappeared. In 1882-1890 Semipalatinsk merchant F. Plescheev built St. Alexander Nevsky Church at his own expense, in the historical reality it was in front of the OSPU, it was closed in 1929, then using the building for an OSPU officers' club. He also built a wooden church, Our Lady of the Sign, which was closed in January 1930. In 1899-1901 St. Nicholas Church was built, which was dismantled in 1934, the same fate befell Annunciation Church, built in 1895: it was closed in the early 30-s and was used as a Turksib club named after Comrade Stalin, and then dismantled into bricks. In 1937, the only Holy Assumption Church was closed in Ridder city. St. Basil's Cathedral in Ust-Kamenogorsk was closed and converted into a granary. Trinity church was closed in 1928. In 1936 in Ust-Kamenogorsk, two renovationist temples, Basil Meeting House and Three Saints Orthodox Church, and Intercession prayer house, located at № 48 Sennaya street discontinued to operate [25]. All liturgical objects were mercilessly destroyed, and buildings gradually fell into disrepair, as they were used as the warehouses of District Consumer Unions, industrial training workshops.

The period of "storm and stress" was not so effective; the results of the SRB depended on many objective and subjective factors, including the local and regional features. Penal and administrative measures used by the SRB, had not brought the desired results: anti-religious propaganda didn't provide the influence on those who sincerely believed; repression didn't discourage them. Sometimes there were those who tried to remember God, so in 1935, an article was introduced in the criminal law for a punishment of 12 years for counterrevolutionary activity; even for the younger generation. One could say that the atheist five-year plan for a godless people failed, which was confirmed by the 1937 census, "arranged by the enemies of the people", when two-thirds of the population declared themselves as believers.

The Great Patriotic War promoted the consolidation of all patriotic groups. The government, which had been destroying religious cults for a long time, called on all the faithful to be together with their homeland in this time of hardship. At the beginning of the war "Atheist" and "Antireligioznik" periodicals were closed as unnecessary, and stopped recruiting people into the Union. Many members of the UIS (Union of Internal Safety) were called to the front. In 1941, at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, the League of Militant Atheists of USSR ceased its existence.

During the Great Patriotic War, the government turned its face to the faithful, softening repressive methods, and allowing the opening of some religious temples. The Council for RPC (Regional Party Center) in USSR SNC allowed in № 7 protocol from April 5, 1944 to open a church in Semipalatinsk city. Resurrection Church remained the only functioning one for a long time. Here, in 1945, the famous icon of Znamensk-Abalatskaya Lady found its refuge.

NCIA (National Committee of Internal Affairs) reports often provide information of the distribution of religious pamphlets during the war. The "soft" evaluation of the content of these leaflets and of the attempts to spread it are of interest and the lack of guidance for the use of

repressive measures against the distributors is more evidence of the impact of the political situation on the authorities mitigating religious policies. If we consider that, according to party officials, most believers in the 1940s - were women and the older generation, the natural desire of the authorities not to punish the rear is clear, as otherwise - who would work for the front? "... There have been cases of mass distribution of leaflets of a religious nature, such as a leaflet which read: "In the city of Jerusalem there is a cathedral, where was the voice of Christ during Tenebrae; read three times a day "Our Father," and you will be saved. Give the note to 9 people in 9 days and you get joy. One person received the note and gave it away. His son was killed".

Though the leaflets in their content are not anti-Soviet, they had a corresponding negative effect; for the recipients of these leaflets to avoid grief and unhappiness had to read the "Our Father" prayer several times, and pass them to others. In large part the beneficiaries were the parents and relatives of those who went to the Red Army." [26].

After the war, SRC gave permission for the restoration of only 29 mosques in Kazakhstan; officially 29 mosques and 30 Muslim communities were registered the Kazakh SSR. In Semipalatinsk, and Zhana-Semey wooden buildings with minarets, built in the 60-80-ies of the XIX century were returned to the Muslims [27].

In the early 1950s, new persecutions hit religious cults. They were terrible because they were not caused by revolutionary fervor, but consistently, systematically. The slogan of the final overcoming of the "religious survivors" was proclaimed. Again the closing of churches began, the bells ringing was banned, and any pastors' activity was pursued outside of the church fence.

Conclusion. Having declared "freedom of conscience" and having formally announced its non-interference in the affairs of the church, the state carried out practically a policy of denial of religion and restrictions of believers' rights. In this case, the declared "secular" character of the state had been replaced by "atheist." The ideal solution for the Soviet leadership would have been to prohibit all religion completely by law, but it was impossible in the social-political conditions and geographical frameworks.

The appearance of the thesis of the anti-Soviet, counter-revolutionary character of religious centers triggered the massive closure of churches, public burning of icons and religious books. There was some easing of repressive religious policies during the Great Patriotic War, when the field was revived and temples and mosques were opened, but the beginning of the 1950s marked a new round of persecution associated with the implementation of the slogan of the final overcoming of the "religious survivors." The activities of the anti-religious committee, the «Union of Militant Atheists» were aimed at the destruction of the country's religious views and at atheistic views formation.

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**Эволюция взаимоотношений советского государства и религии
(1920 – начало 1950-х гг.)**

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Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена вопросам взаимоотношений религиозного культа с советской властью. Автор затрагивает сложный и порой трагический период тотальной эскалации силового прессинга на представителей религиозного культа. Автор уделяет внимание законодательным основам реализуемой советской властью антирелигиозной политики, освещает вопросы деятельности антирелигиозных государственных структур, выявляя ее репрессивную направленность на уничтожение религии.

Ключевые слова: Религиозный культ; ислам; православие; Союз воинствующих безбожников; шариатисты; безбожная пятилетка.