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Religion in Russia

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

HON. FRANCES P. BOLTON

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 12, 1961

Mrs. BOLTON. Mr. Speaker, one of my constituents, Dr. R. Richard Renner, gave a very interesting talk before the annual pilgrimage of Religious Heritage of America which was held in Washington this year on June 22.

Under leave to extend my remarks I am inserting Dr. Renner's address in the RECORD, believing my colleagues will enjoy reading it as much as I did:

RELIGION IN RUSSIA

(Address delivered by R. Richard Renner, M.D., a report to the Religious Heritage of America at the annual meeting, June 22, 1961, Washington, D.C.)

We, Mrs. Renner and I, feel honored at this time to give to the Religious Heritage of America our report of the World Peace Mission to Russia. We thank you for your confidence in appointing us as official delegates of the Religious Heritage. On our way we first stopped to counsel with the outstanding peace leaders of Britain, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and West and East Germany. Everyone thought peace the most important problem before the civilized world today. And everyone thought that only one-tenth of 1 percent of the moral and spiritual leaders of the world are really doing anything personal for the cause of peace. The rest of the religious people are complacently trusting their governments to take care of the peaceful solutions of the world's governmental, ideological conflicts, which, according to our preparation and spending will sooner or later lead to war as the final total settlement of the conflict.

We were personally warned by our friends of the dangers of such a mission especially in the light of the Berlin crisis about to come to a head in 1959. Even close relatives doubted the wisdom of the trip and when it came time for the final briefing by a representative from our State Department on how to act and what to do, we found that a large percentage of the delegates had decided because of the Berlin trouble not to risk the trip. There were only 12 of us.

While the plans had been perfected more by the Baptists than any other church group, we personally carried letters of introduction from our brotherhood to Dr. Zidkhov, head of the Baptist Christian Churches in Russia, inviting him and delegates of the church to come to America and especially to church

conventions the following year in Scotland. We are happy to say that two delegates came and took an active part in the World Convention of Christian Churches last year in Edinburgh.

Our first encounter with the people behind the so-called Iron Curtain came in Berlin. We transferred to a different bus at the Brandenburg Gate. The East Berlin people had sent an interpreter and a noted historian, Dr. Beck, to meet us there and show us the city. East Berlin still shows the terrible destruction wrought by the American Air Force. Hitler's Reichstag is left not one stone on another, and Hitler's bombproof shelter with its six layers of concrete reinforced by steel rails is nothing but a hole in the ground with the protecting tower toppled on its side. Where there was hustle and bustle and much store and window shopping in West Berlin, the streets are much more quiet and almost deserted in East Berlin. True, they have completely rebuilt Unter den Linden, now renamed Stalin Allee. For over 2 miles the beautiful wide street is now lined with new apartment buildings with some stores on the main floors.

There is a Russian monument west of the Brandenburg Gate with two Russian soldiers guarding the first tank and the first large cannon to arrive in Berlin. But this was small compared to the large Russian Memorial Cemetery in East Berlin where 600,000 Russians who died in the march on Berlin lie buried. Here were Russian soldiers on guard as at the Tomb of our Unknown Soldier. I found out the monuments were made out of the stones from the Reichstag which permitted me to understand more why Hitler's final headquarters is now only a mass of weeds and rubble.

After the tour, we were taken to the Newa Hotel where a group from the Department of Education, Welfare, and Peace entertained us with a regular banquet. They all seemed very sincere and were anxious to document many things about the rearming of West Germany to which they strongly objected. We were all permitted to have our say. Some of our group were determined to let them know how much superior democracy is to communism. It was all very friendly and in the end someone proposed a toast to peace saying how much better it would be if our governments could meet around a common table and freely discuss the problems of world peace.

We had to be at the East Berlin airport at 7 a.m. the next morning so we could all get clearance for the 8 a.m. plane for Moscow. At 9:30 we were told the plane would be delayed and they gave us some breakfast. After lunch we finally got through the gates and were on our way.

At Vilnius we ran into the worst storm I have ever experienced in an airplane. The

stewardess took the pilot up a little extra bracer but we did not fasten seat belts or anything. Here at Vilnius we had dinner and filled out papers concerning our money and our lack of hashish and other narcotic drugs. About 11:30 p.m. we arrived in Moscow. The airport was literally crowded with people sitting or lying on the floor. Eventually, a bus came for us, and coming in over the country roads I was surprised that the driver used only his dim lights all the way. He turned his bright lights on only in passing cars and at intersections. This is the custom in much of central Europe for night driving.

Soon we entered the city and passed long rows of apartment buildings all about the same—seven or eight stories in height on either side. Eventually, after midnight we arrived at the Leningradskaya Hotel. It was a big new skyscraper building. Inside were marble pillars and stairways, red velvet carpets, huge chandeliers and everything magnificent. Soon we were up in our room where we found everything very ornate; fine linens on the beds; a large round table with a linen tablecloth; a sort of anteroom with a pretty sofa and easy chairs and with a large modern all-tile bathroom and large coat closets. This was their second best hotel built in 1953 near the four depots on Komsomolska Square and it certainly made a good impression on us.

The next morning on our way to breakfast we met Carl Sandburg, there to help open the American Exposition. After breakfast in the ornate dining room I went out and stood in front of our hotel overlooking the public square just to study the Russians. People were hurrying to and from the subway, the four railway stations and the suburban trains. After some considerable study I formulated in my mind the striking difference between the Russian and American women. The Russian women wore bubushkas mostly instead of hats. The hair, even though combed, did not have all the pretty "wrinkles" and curls like the American woman. The lips and the cheeks were unpainted. The clothes were mostly of one color. The skirts were all much longer. The shoes were all black, without the high heels, and the stockings were also black and coarse like grandmother used to wear.

The men wore caps, berets or old hats, tunics with some jackets and their pants were not well pressed at all like American pants are. Many carried baggage. The women all did their fair share. Some carried over their shoulders bags made of string netting through which you could see bread, crackers, fruit, vegetables and other articles bought at the store. Nothing came in cans or in paper packages. Old newspapers, sacks and cigarette packages were not used. That made the job of the women with large witches' brooms cleaning the entire street on our side of the square much

easier. You never see rubbish or litter of any kind in the wide clean streets in Russia, thanks partly to the women with the brooms and partly to the fact that there is nothing with which to litter the streets.

I thought as I studied the people that I could see there a faraway sad look in their faces. No one else mentioned this. I was perhaps giving way to imagination for we often read into people's faces as well as their minds that which is mirrored back from our own minds.

The people from the Moscow-Leningrad area go south to the Urals and the Black Sea for their vacations, but all the rest of the Russian people come to Moscow and Leningrad. That is why we had opportunity to meet people from many different states. One couple we met at the puppet show had traveled 7 days and nights from Omsk, Siberia, where the man was manager of a cooperative farm. They both spoke good English. They were delightful people. We met many, at the permanent Russian Exposition and in the Kremlin Gardens, from the Uzbek and other republics. Not once did we come in contact with any person who was mean or unfriendly to us.

The line was four abreast, about one-half mile long, waiting to get into the Lenin-Stalin Mausoleum. Our guide took us to the head of the line, but no one seemed to resent it. Down in that cold red granite tomb I studied the two perfectly preserved men who, in all-glass coffins, would seem to be still alive. There was no sign of any wrinkle in the skin, discoloration or other change you would expect even in the perfectly embalmed body. The only bodies I had seen to compare with these were in Madame Toussaud's Wax Works in London. Therefore, one wonders if these are not wax reproductions of Lenin and Stalin and the tomb is kept cold at all times to prevent the wax from melting.

That night at the circus everything was in one ring. Ed Sullivan was there with the President of the Eastman Kodak Co. We saw many acts that might fit well on the "Sullivan Show." But I was surprised at the second half when they let down from overhead enough water to fill the entire ring and the last half was a water show with tigers swimming around in that water doing some simple stunts.

At the permanent Russian Exposition there were large beautiful buildings representing each different Soviet Republic. Inside each building were shown the farm and manufactured products of each republic. Outside were beautiful fountains and all in all it made me wish that somewhere America had a place where each State could show visual evidence of its achievements.

We had visited the Russian Exposition in the Coliseum in New York and naturally made comparisons at the American Exposition in Moscow. It did not seem to me that a great number of our ultramodern paintings was appropriate for the average Russian. As I watched the faces of some of the Russians, it seemed to me they were wondering about the American mind and our sense of the beautiful. The "Family of Man" exhibit, showing the origin from prehistoric times, was puzzling to me as well as to the Russians. An American exposition ought to show things common to America and not what probably was the condition of man 10,000 to 50,000 years ago. The most crowded part of the American Exposition was the auto show, which you could not get near, for the mass of people wanting to closely inspect those new Fords, Plymouths, and Chevrolets.

Our visit to Zagorsk, the famous seminary for training of Orthodox priests, was most enjoyable. This seminary, located 50 miles north and founded in 1320, has never been shut down and continued to train priests all during the revolution. Monk Paul, whose

picture was in Life magazine, was the one to show us through the educational part of the seminary. There were many beautiful churches. Some of the turnip-shaped cupolas on top were covered with gold leaf and some were a deep blue with gold decorations. Many people of the town came for the noon services. At that time I slipped out of the fortress-like walls of the seminary grounds to explore and was able to get pictures wherever desired on the back streets and the poorer parts of the city. Outside of the numerous television aerials, even over the poorest unpainted houses, the unpaved back streets and alleys with the dirt sidewalks and community wells with women carrying water two or three blocks was about what we had in many of our smaller villages several generations ago.

Along the way we had seen several "living" churches, those where services were being held regularly. The larger ones that could not support themselves were made into museums and obviously thought of as "dead" churches. However, in these museum churches I noticed people still bowed and crossed themselves before the statues and ikons showing there is still much religious faith in Russia.

We visited one day the home of the Metropolitan Nicolai or as we would say, the topman or head of all the Orthodox churches in Moscow. He spoke to us in English and tried to make us welcome; telling us much about the present-day status of the church. Later, there was a nice reception in the gardens for us. The next morning at his church I was surprised to find the sanctuary filled to overflowing. There were no seats. Everybody stood for the 2-hour services. There was wonderful singing by the choir without benefit of organ or other musical instrument. The Metropolitan Nicolai had many assistants to help him with his different robes, vestments, and head crowns. The procession had worked its way to the back of the church, when I noticed an open side door near me. I stepped out into the sunlight and looked around for some interesting things for the movies.

Across the street were many people going in and out of a building. On closer examination I found it was a shoe store. The people came in, went over to a clerk, showed a card, then went back to the racks of all black shoes stored on shelves all down the middle of the room. The women's shoes were little different from the men's. After they had handled the proper size shoes, they measured them beside their feet, maybe tried another pair, and then carried them back to the clerk who flipped one unit of the abacus. They then put the shoes in the net bag and left the store. No time was wasted trying on the shoes because there was not a single chair in the store. It had our self-serve stores beaten in every way.

But, I wondered and began to ask about the Sunday closing laws. Slowly I learned everybody works on Sunday; they do their shopping on Sunday for the weekend and Monday is the day of rest.

This accounted for the fact that most of the people in the churches were old people. While they do not openly stop church attendance they discourage it by keeping up all business as usual on Sunday and having Monday of each week as the day off. This was obviously a left-handed slap at the church to prevent attendance. It was the Government's way of telling the people that nothing, not even their religion or their God must come between them and their work. This was striking at religion "below the belt."

When I arrived back at the church, here was our group outside ready to go over to the Baptist Church. But three women had followed the group out saying the Metropolitan was worried about us leaving for fear something was wrong. We tried to explain that the Baptist Christian group was

expecting us over at their second service. We finally compromised and some of our leaders stayed at the Orthodox Church while the rest of us went across part of the city to the Baptist Christian Church.

It had become expedient after the war for all the Protestant groups to be united in one church because of lack of building space for meeting houses. The Baptists being the predominant group have their name first but its official name is Baptist-Christian. Here we found ushers waiting to take us to seats in the balcony where we could look over the entire sanctuary. It is hard to believe but even in the aisles and across the front and back, people were standing. There were some younger people in the audience and a good proportion in the choir. Dr. Zidkhov was preaching an expository sermon when we arrived. When the services were over the people shook our hands and we felt the sincerity of their welcome. In the private conference following, we delivered our personal letter to Dr. Zidkhov. Assistants trained in England were good interpreters. There is no place in Russia to train other than Orthodox ministers. In the conference we learned that their greatest need was for Bibles printed in the Russian language. Since the Government there controlled the presses and would not permit the printing of Bibles, they hoped we could get some from the American Bible Society and mail them without any outside markers, simply as gift books, addressed to their private homes.

There had been one earlier Sunday service and there were to be three more with only an hour between so we had to part with these kind people. But all of us were convinced that morning, that in spite of any godless government, religion is not now dead nor even dying in Russia.

Our next religious trip was to the home of Tolstol, about 150 miles south of the city. We got a faster bus but it still took 5 hours. The little country homes in the little towns along the way with the common well and the women washing clothes along the edge of the brook reminded me of travel through the Indian villages of Mexico. There were no gas stations or Howard Johnson restaurants anywhere and the only comfort station was a woods about half way along where the bus stopped and the men and women disappeared in two different directions.

Beyond the city of Tula is the large former estate of Leo Tolstol. His home containing the library and other relics is lovingly preserved and cared for. I gained a great respect for the man and decided to study his life in detail as soon as I had opportunity.

Next, we went to see his grave. I expected to see a large monument in the local cemetery to this great man of Russia and one of the greatest authors the world has ever known. We were led along a winding path about a third of a mile into the woods behind the home. There, in the deep woods on his estate, with no monument or Orthodox cross, no headstone of any kind, is the lonely grave with some white flowers growing upon it. We learned he could not be buried from any church, nor have his final resting place in any cemetery. He could not have a priest, let alone any Metropolitan Nicolai, all because he had taught that serfdom was wrong; that men should not be in bondage 3 days a week to the government of the Czars, but should be educated; they should be nonviolent; they should avoid conscription and military service; they should avoid intoxicants, drugs and tobacco. People should share their wealth, give up their monopoly, end serfdom and all forms of war and military service. You might readily see why this teaching would turn the Government against him and cause many of his followers to be banished to Siberia. But why would teach-

ing like this turn the church against him when it would seem to be in line with the teachings of Christ?

It is hard to understand until we study and realize that the state, the Government and the church were one. The Czar was head of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Government gave complete financial support to the church. Therefore, the church gave complete moral, spiritual and political support to the Government. And when Tolstol offended the Government he doubly offended the church. Standing there in the deep shade of the forest I gave a silent prayer of thanks for the heritage of America, wherein our wise forefathers planned and tried to make certain and final the complete and total permanent separation of state and church in this beloved land.

Our experiences with the people were very much the same in Leningrad as in Moscow. I took movies and we went around by ourselves in the evenings whenever we knew where we wanted to go and thought we could get back without getting lost. St. Isaac's most beautiful cathedral is now a museum and swinging from this third highest church dome in the world is a Foucault pendulum, proving scientifically that the earth rotates on its axis. People still cross themselves at all the holy places in front of the beautiful ikons. It is perfectly logical to know these enormous cathedrals could not be supported and maintained by free will offerings and naturally the government could solve the problem by converting them into public museums.

I would like to tell you about the one, Kazan Cathedral, converted into an anti-religious museum, showing in many ways the horrors of the Inquisition, the rack, the burning at the stake, the massacres on St. Bartholomew's Day and the many crimes which we admit were committed in the name of religion. These crimes helped drive religious people to America which is the only good thing I can say about them. I have tried to point out that these crimes were committed mostly by the state when the church and state were one. Just because a government commits a crime in the name of religion and with the consent of so-called religious people does not make it any less a duty of every Christian to see that his religion is never dependent on political or financial support of any government. In this connection I would like to point out that the crucifixion of Christ was a crime committed by the government under the sanction and in the name of religion.

We were greatly impressed by the summer palaces of the czars and the 600 fountains at Peterhof on the Gulf of Finland. The czar went to Versailles and came back to make a park more wonderful and impressive. I believe he did. Water comes down from the mountains over 200 miles away to keep the fountains going night and day. Many women are busy keeping the grounds perfect. The summer palaces are beautifully restored on the outside but on the inside they are still a shambles because it was here the German Army was quartered during the 900-day siege of Leningrad which was completely surrounded that entire time. Over 1 million people starved to death in that period. The only lifeline was over the frozen Lake Ladoga in the dead of winter. And it seems to be a fact that Russia lost over 20 million people, killed or starved to death during the war. This bad news was kept from the Russian people during the war to prevent them from becoming discouraged. This might give America some idea of how much help Russia was to us in winning World War II when some authorities tell us they suffered 80 times as many casualties as we did.

At the Baptist Church in Leningrad they were repairing the front of the church. We

entered from the rear and were immediately ushered up to the very front row. The assistant pastor came down and asked me about our world peace mission. He announced to the whole audience what I had told him. There were two different moderately short sermons. In English we were welcomed. They too had hoped we were bringing Bibles. But their desire for peace seemed sincere to us. At the conclusion, we sang with them "God Be With You 'Till We Meet Again." I looked back. They were waving their white handkerchiefs above their heads and tears were streaming down the cheeks of many of those people.

At the Hermitage Art Galleries I could hardly believe my own eyes. It was the big Palace of the Czars filled with the most costly original art treasures of all the world. Catherine the Great gets credit for accumulating most of these treasures. Where she got the money to buy them would be a mystery to any thinking person. There were few guards as we spent most of the day going from one big beautiful room to another. Some say the Hermitage is second to the Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery in London. The settings and the surroundings made a great impression on me and I would call the Hermitage second to none. However, that is not the voice of authority for art is not my specialty.

Near here is Revolution Square and the famous gate where the people poured through on November 9, 1917, with the slogans on their lips of "Peace and land for the peasants" and "Peace and bread for the workmen." It was here that I asked "What caused this sudden revolution in the first place?" "Oh, it was not sudden," I was told. It had been coming on for over a half century and was all due to the autocracy of the Czars and the ruling nobility and their suppression of the peasants and working people who were unable to own their own land and had to work 3 days a week for the Czars. In 1859 when Tolstol first began to write against serfdom there were over 23 million bound to the soil with no civil rights and always bound in debt owing heavy dues and services to their lords.

Czar Alexander II was forced to start freeing these people in 1861. He would probably have made more reforms but he was assassinated in 1881. As the new Czar Alexander III came to the throne he received a letter from the opposition, protesting crimes of the government and ending up as follows: "Revolutionists are the creation of circumstances; of the general discontent of the people; of the striving of Russia after a new social framework. It is impossible, by means of repression to stifle discontent. Discontent only grows the more when it is repressed." But Alexander III only repressed the people more and more. As the world industrial revolution began to affect Russia, the power and discontent of the lower and middle classes grew.

Son Nicholas II became Czar in 1894. He had less intellect and less character than his father. He gave the fierce Cossacks and the secret police full power to deal with the revolutionary societies in any way they desired. The Russo-Japanese War was expected to unite the people against Japan but even war failed to make the people forget their sad condition and they blamed the Czar's regime for the defeat.

On January 22, 1905, a priest named Father Gapon on this Sunday led an enormous crowd with a petition to the czar at the winter palace in St. Petersburg. The petition in part declared: "We workers—have come to you, sire, in search of justice and protection. We have fallen into poverty; we are oppressed; we are loaded with a crushing burden of toll; we are insulted; we are not recognized as men; we are treated as slaves who should bear their sad and

bitter lot in patience and silence. Do not refuse to protect your people; raise it from the grave of arbitrary power, poverty, and ignorance; permit it to dispose of its own fate; free it from the intolerable oppression of officials; destroy the wall between yourself and your people and let them govern the country with you."

Before they got near the czar, just as they approached the palace the waiting Cossack guards opened fire on this defenseless crowd, killing many and wounding more.

The London Times correspondent described this as "the most horrible spectacle ever witnessed." Blood flowed in streams on the hardened snow. Police slashed blindly at the crowd. They used their revolvers and whole companies of infantry "discharged murderous volleys on the shrieking crowd. Women and children covered with blood fell wounded over the dead in the cold snow. This is not a strike. It is a revolution."

As a result of this Red Sunday massacre a general strike was called. Russia was paralyzed. The Orthodox church, long the bulwark of autocracy, tried this appeal to the people: "Workers of Russia, children of toll. Work, according to God's Word, with the sweat of your brow and remember that he who will not work, neither shall he eat. Beware of false counselors who, pretending anxiety over your needs and well-being foment disorders which lose you your homes and your food. They are the lesser agents of the evil enemy who desires the destruction of Russia."

This revolution of 1905 eventually failed due to the military power of the czar and the supporting power of the Orthodox church. Many people were hanged and many were deported to Siberia. While the Russian Revolution was driven underground, do you wonder that it would erupt again when Russia was torn asunder by World War I and that because the Orthodox church, being supported by autocracy and supporting the czars, would be considered as a factor that must have no part in the new government of 1917? No part of the Bolshevik policy has received more criticism than their treatment of the Orthodox church. But the Orthodox church was partly to blame because of their complete subordination to the czars. It was only natural that the new government would deprive the church of its powers over education.

But it goes deeper than that for the Communist Party is intensely jealous of religion and thinks the individual should have no loyalty except to the state. That is why attendance at divine services was forbidden to party members. Religion could not be taught to anyone under 18 except in the home. No religious activity was permitted except worship. Anti-religious teaching was stressed and many churches were made into museums. Our guide was willing to argue with me and openly declared she could not see how I could be a scientific practitioner of medicine and still believe in God.

The pendulum that swung so far against religion under Stalin is now swinging back slightly under Mr. Khrushchev. They have learned that religion is not stamped out by law. The Jews have a nice synagogue in Moscow and Leningrad. For the Moslems in Leningrad there is an exact replica of the tomb of Tamerlane in Samarkand, a most beautiful mosque. Tolerance of minorities is increasing and well it should be, for some day the religious people of Russia will awake to the fact that the whole Communist Party is about the least minority of any group in Russia (1 to 2 percent) even if it at present is the most powerful. And no small minority can forever rule the great majority when that majority becomes aware of its own power.

In conclusion, it would be my impression that we in America should remember that:

1. The Communist regime represents approximately only 2 percent of the Russian people.
2. The Russian people are better off now than they were under the czars.
3. The Russian people are friendly and would like to be friends of America.
4. The Russian Government has been able to instill in them some fear but no hate for America.
5. The antireligion in the present Government is due to the fact that the Ortho-

dox Church was part and parcel of the hated czarist autocratic government.

6. The pendulum always swings too far in times of revolution and even now the pendulum in Russia is swinging back to the side of religious freedom.

7. America should be strong at home but not flaunt its military power over all the world to make people think they personally are in danger of our wrath.

8. We should keep up more religious, spiritual, and cultural contact with the Russian people.

9. We should invite delegations of Russians to come to America to visit our churches as well as our farms and factories.

10. We should remember Russia fought on our side in World War II as well as World War I. Russia lost 20 million people in World War II and still has a genuine fear of a reunited Germany. It is time now to end World War II with a peace treaty and thus end the cold war. America should take the lead in peace and send our Peace Corps to Russia as well as to the rest of the world.