

"ISLAMIC ETHICS" AND ITS SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Following is the translation of an article by M. T. Stepanyants in The Russian-language journal Voprosy Filosofii (Philosophical Problems No. 2, 1966, pages 100-109.)

The different aspects of Islamic ideology have served as the object of Marxist analysis. However, the ethical side of this religious doctrine was hitherto hardly illuminated. Ignoring of ethical aspect of Islam is historically unjustified, inasmuch as moral problems, just as in other religions, occupy a central position. An analysis of the "ethics of Islam" becomes all the more necessary at present when it is precisely this side of Moslem religion which is advanced by its ideologists as the main and basic (but often the only) ideological reference-point on the road to the independent development of "Moslem" countries. Some see in "Islamic ethics" the expression of their own national spiritual heritage; others affirm that only this religion is able to save the East from the degrading influence of the bourgeois West; a third group hope to use the ethical dogmas of Islam as a basic counterweight of spreading advanced ideology, first of all: Marxism-Leninism.

In its own terms "Islamic ethics" is very conditional. Strictly speaking, "Islamic ethics" (in exactly the same way as Christian, Buddhist, etc.) does not exist. This term embraces the moral ideas of defined social groups in corresponding epochs, expressed in a religious form. Therefore an objective analysis of "Islamic ethics" requires us to consider Islam in its historical development, to discover the class content of contradictory moral conceptions, along with the general concept of "ethics of Islam".

In Islam, as in other religions, positions are maintained which are very contradictory in content. The majority of Soviet orientalists considers Islam as an ideology which arose in the VII Century, during the period of transition of the Arabs to the stage of a class society. Islam's subsequent development was directly dependent on the historical changes in the fates of its adherents. By virtue of a number of objective causes, Islam not infrequently remains one form of collective movements, even in the epoch of the development of capitalistic relationships. The special role