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***LEO TOLSTOY AND AHMADIYYA COMMUNITY.  
'REVIEW OF RELIGIONS' IN THE WRITER'S LIBRARY  
COLLECTION<sup>1</sup>***

About twenty-two thousand copies of books, brochures and periodicals written in twenty languages have been preserved in the well-stocked library in the house in Yasnaya Polyana. Most of them were gathered by the host himself, Leo Tolstoy, while working but others, however, were sent to him by publishers and authors. They all show the owner's wide variety of interests and numerous notes and comments made on their margins are an expression of his careful and active reading.

Interestingly enough, the periodicals sent to Tolstoy by religious organizations were published in Russia as well as in other European and Asian countries but there was not a single Catholic, Protestant or Jewish copy among them. However, appearing in the library catalogs copies of 'Review of Religions' (compiled after the owner's death) have been preserved as 'an Indian journal sent to Tolstoy by the editors'.

Ahmadiyya, a Muslim Community (Jama'at) was founded in Qadian (Punjab) at the turn of 1888 and 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) who based on revelations received regularly since 1865 proclaimed himself a prophet, Mahdi, a messiah and a restorer awaited by the world's major religious systems. Through his passionate writing activity, participation in polemics and disputes with Muslims, whom he accused of falling religious zeal, and representatives of other denominations (Hindus, Christians, Sikhs) he sought to restore Islam to its imagined original purity and adapt it to the requirements of the modern world, hence the traditional as well as modernistic character of the community.

The specific concept to Ahmadiyya, which found itself beyond its main movement mainly as a result of mainstream Islam's rejection of Ahmad's prophetic aspirations, was the spiritual understanding of the category of 'holy

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a part of an article published in Polish as: P. Stawiński, *Uwagi do tematu: Lew Tolstoj i islam*, „Rocznik Muzułmański”, 1416 h [1995], R. IV, T. 3, s. 41-52. Transl. Marzena Zaba.

war' (jihad) and the study of the further life of the prophet Jesus (‘Īsā ibn Maryam), who was saved from the death on the cross and came to Kashmir, where his grave (Srinagar) was to be located<sup>2</sup>.

Created in 1902 ‘Review of Religions’ journal was intended to promote in Europe the religious ideas of the ‘Promised Messiah’, as Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was called. Initially, it was released in two language versions (Urdu and English) and although its main goal was to present its own views, it also devoted attention to discussions covering the history and beliefs as well as other religions and interreligious polemics.

Everything seems to indicate that for the first time Tolstoy encountered with the journal in 1903, when he received a copy of it along with a letter from Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, in April 28<sup>th</sup> that year. Dr. Sadiq was a companion of Ahmad, and one of the first missionaries of the movement. The Tolstoy’s response to the letter is essential for understanding his attitude towards various religious systems, including the Ahmadiyya Community and the ambitions of its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Although it appears that the writer was not particularly familiar with the nature of the Community and its position in the Islamic world, the correspondence may show that in his interests he was not limited to classical works and he was also acquainted with unorthodox branches of Islam. The writer’s reaction may seem quite harsh in tone, but it should not be perceived as dismissive. As a matter of fact, Tolstoy’s interlocutors were always treated with respect, but never at the expense of his own ideas or honesty when expressing thoughts.

*Dear Sir,*

*I have received your letter along with a leaflet containing a portrait of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as well as a copy of the ‘Review of Religions’. I find the proof of Jesus's death and the discovery of the alleged grave totally useless as no reasonable man can believe in the resurrection<sup>3</sup>. As for the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, whom you address the Promised Messiah, everything what you have written about him and what was written in the leaflet does not interest me at all as we do not need*

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<sup>2</sup> On the theme of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and the Ahmadiyya Community he founded, cf. my work: *Ahmadijja islam zreformowany*, Czestochowa 1994, pp. 140 [*Ahmadiyya - reformed Islam*, in Polish].

<sup>3</sup> Tolstoy did not understand the views of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as he did not proclaim Jesus's resurrection, but like all other Muslims based on the Quranic message (4:157), he denied His death on the cross. The specificity of the views was behind the aforementioned belief that after removing him alive from the cross and recovering with a special ointment, Jesus went to the East and there he departed his life in an old age. Cf: Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Jesus in India: Being an Account of Jesus’ Escape from Death on the Cross and of His Journey to India*, London 1978 (first edition in Urdu, 1899).

*a new messiah. What we really need is wise religious teachings and if Mirza Ghulam is able to teach people such things, I will gladly accept it, but I have not heard about it so far.*

*I have read both articles with appreciation: How to free yourself from the sin and Future life, especially the last one<sup>4</sup>.*

*Thank you for the letter and the parcel<sup>5</sup>.*

Less than three months later, Tolstoy wrote another letter to Mufti Sadiq:

*Dear Sir,*

*Thank you very much for your letter which I have received along with the 12th issue of 'Review of Religions'. A considerable number of the articles are very interesting, but I regret that the majority of the articles concern polemics and discussions with other Churches. I do not mean to say that they are unpersuasive, but I have found them useless. I have also read the works of the Promised Messiah and I am convinced that there is nothing in them contrary to reason. Unfortunately, I have not found anything new either or expressed in a better way than what had been written before him.*

*I totally agree with you that the main evil of our times is the lack of a true religion. Personally, I think that everyone who has such feelings should share them with their loved ones by all possible means, mainly by giving an example of a good life. This is what we need and what we should do now<sup>6</sup>.*

The reflections on the articles contained in the 'Review of Religions' can also be found in memories of a family doctor and long-time friend of the writer, Slovakian, Dr. Dushan Makovitsky. Tolstoy mentioned the journal in May and then again in November 1905, when he praised 'solemnity, a sense of dignity and peace of Muslims (Tatars and others)<sup>7</sup>, still not being aware, at that time, of the nature of the Ahmadiyya Movement and its position within Islam. In general, he was not impressed with it: 'a weak magazine, continuously polemicising with Christianity and what is more they have some prophet'<sup>8</sup>. On

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<sup>4</sup> Tolstoy means articles whose original titles are *How to Get Rid of Sin* and *The Life to Come*. This is confirmed by Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, at work: *Ahmadiyyat. The Renaissance of Islam*, London 1978, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Tolstoy L.N., *Polnoe sobrane sochinenii. 90 vols.*, Moscow 1954, vol. 74, pp. 132-133. [letter of May 22nd, 1903].

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 158-159 [letter of August 10, 1903].

<sup>7</sup> Makovitsky D.P., *U Tolstogo 1904-1910. Yasnopolianskie zapiski*, 'Literaturnoe nasledstvo', vol. 90, Moscow 1979, book 1, p. 453.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

the other hand, the articles on marriage and the position of women in Islam, presumably *Polygamy* and *Objections Against Polygamy Refuted*<sup>9</sup>, made a great impression on the writer. When summarizing them to his friends and family he emphasized a higher ideal of monogamy in the religion, adding that polygamy with appropriate rules and regulations was also acceptable. He stated with appreciation of the concern for the lack of regard in the doctors' approach for the women's shame and he was interested in dealing with unfaithful wives to their husbands. In general, he considered the Muslim attitude towards women as better than 'the hypocrisy of Christian monogamy'<sup>10</sup>.

Having shared these thoughts with his close friend Sergey Nikolaev, a translator and the author of *Krishna's Life*, Tolstoy suggested translating the mentioned articles into Russian. In the middle of April 1907, Dushan Makovitsky, at the request of the writer, asked Vladimir Chertkov to send some of Tolstoy's essays to the editor of the discussed periodical in Qadian in Punjab<sup>11</sup>.

The Tolstoy's last encounter with the 'Review of Religions' journal, confirmed in his memoirs, dates back to June 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>, 1908, when another copy from India found among the received mail became a pretext for reflection on women's apostasy as well as more general thoughts such as showing disapproval of adopting a European lifestyle by Hindus. 'Should all ideals', asked the author of *The Confession*, 'consist in assimilating liberalism?'<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Review of Religions', vol. IV, no. 3, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Makovitsky D.P., *U Tolstogo...*, pp. 286, 294 [statements from May 17 and 25, 1905].

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, book 2, p. 414 (April 14, 1907). In December 1907, when they were correcting the Tolstoy's translation of the *Four Gospels*, Nikolaev shared his impressions after reading an article in the 'Review of Religions', which was highly critical of Jesus, mainly for not acting against drunkenness, and even 'sanctifying' it. Tolstoy's response was: 'At that time, drunkenness was not on as large scale as it is today. Cana of Galilee can be understood as if they drank some wine and then wanted more.' [*Ibidem*, p. 579; December 4, 1907].

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, book 3, p. 120. Tolstoy worked at that time on a reply to the letter of a journalist and a political activist, an editor of the 'Free Hindustan' magazine, Taraknath Das (Tarak Nath Das) regarding the situation of Hindus under British Rule. This resulted in an article entitled *Letter to Hindu*. The writer thought back to his work on August 13, 1908 when he raised the thread of the idea of redemption according to evangelists of which he had read in some 'Muslim journal'. He did not remember however, whether it was a 'Review of Religions' or another magazine, published in Paris. [Makovitsky D.P., *op. cit.*, book 4, p. 322].