

The New York Times

October 5, 1975

page 18

Libya Is Spending Millions to Promote Spread of the Islamic Faith

TRIPOLI, Libya, Oct. 4 (AP)—Libya is spending some of her oil income on a center to spread the Islamic faith in Africa as well as among Christians in Europe and North and South America.

In downtown Tripoli, in the compound of what was the Roman Catholic Cathedral only five years ago, is the headquarters of the Islamic Call Society. It directs a network of about 200 "propagators" in 35 branches ranging from Brazil to Japan and from Denmark to Kenya.

The society, also maintaining close contact with North America's black and white Moslems, is financed in part by a 4 per cent jihad, or holy-war tax that Libya imposes on income and sales. Its budget is put at \$20-million a year and it is increasing.

Conversions—particularly of Christians in the West—are acclaimed. "A Danish lady came all the way to Tripoli yesterday

to embrace Islam," a society official said. "An Italian lady is next."

"We are now accepted even in Western societies," says the society's head, Sheik Mahmoud Subhi.

Black Africa remains the society's prime target, and it must compete there with Christian missionaries.

Islam's drive southward has won over 140 million of the continent's 340 million people, officials here say. But an African bishop, Jean Zoa of Cameroon, said he expected the continent's Christians, now only 23 per cent of the population, to make up over half by the end of the century.

"In Africa we are ahead," Sheik Subhi said in an interview. "But it's not because of hard work by Moslem and Christian missionaries. It's simply because Islam is a religion of nature. It preaches equality. That simple fact appeals to people."

In parts of Africa swept by rapid decolonization, Christianity is still portrayed as the white man's religion.

While there exist no known incidents in drives for conversions, the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, has promised help to Moslem rebels fighting central governments dominated by Christians, especially to the Eritrean Moslem

rebels in Ethiopia and the Moslems in the Philippines. Libya is also said to have aided Lebanon's Moslems in recent warfare there with Christians.

Colonel Qaddafi views these more as political "liberation" movements than religious conflicts. "To incite Moslems against Christians and vice versa is not among Islamic principles," he once said.

Libya maintains cordial relations with the Vatican. A Vatican delegation was on hand Sept. 1 to applaud the sixth anniversary of the military-Islamic revolution. In December, the Vatican will open another round of "dialogues" in Tripoli inaugurated four years ago.

The Vatican and the Arabs find themselves of like opinion in opposing Israeli's annexation of the Old City of Jerusalem.