244710 - Ruling on using the church as a hall for activities for Muslim children

the question

What is ruling on using the church as a hall for activities for Muslim children. There are no statues or crosses, just some faces on the ceiling.

Detailed answer

Firstly:

It is makrooh for the Muslim to enter a church, because of what it contains of images and statues.

‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: We do not enter their churches because of the statues and images that are in them. Narrated by al-Bukhaari in a mu‘allaq report.

‘Abd ar-Razzaaq narrated this report with a mawsool isnaad via Aslam, the freed slave of ‘Umar, who said: When ‘Umar came to Greater Syria, a Christian man, who was one of their leaders, made some food for him and said: I would like you to do me the honour of coming to visit me. ‘Umar said to him: We do not enter your churches because of the images in them – referring to the statues. End quote from Fath al-Baari (1/531-532).

See also: Fath al-Baari by Ibn Rajab (3/240).

Ibn Rajab (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Maalik regarded it as makrooh to pray in synagogues and churches, because of impurities brought in on their feet [as they do not take off their shoes when entering their places of worship], and because of the images in those places. He said: We do not enter them except in cases of necessity. This was quoted by the author of at-Tahdheeb.

Most of our companions – i.e., the Hanbalis – granted a concession allowing Muslims to enter and pray in churches in which there are no images. But some of them, including Ibn ‘Aqeel,

regarded that as makrooh. Some of them narrated two reports from Ahmad regarding it being makrooh.

Many of our companions clearly stated that it is prohibited to enter a house in which there are images on the walls, if one is not able to remove them, whether it is a bathroom or otherwise. Among them are Ibn Battah and al-Qaadi Abu Ya'laa.

The author of al-Mughni said that the apparent meaning of Ahmad's words indicates that it is makrooh but not haraam. He also narrated that from Maalik.

End quote from Fath al-Baari (3/240-241).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The view adopted by most of our companions is that it makrooh to enter a church in which there are images, so praying in it or in any place in which there are images is even more disliked. This is the correct view, concerning which there can be no doubt.

End quote from al-Fataawa al-Kubra (5/327).

Ibn al-Mundhir (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Praying in churches is permissible, because they are included in the general meaning of the hadith, "The earth has been made a place of prostration [i.e., prayer] and a means of purification for me." But it is makrooh to enter places in which there are images, such as churches and other places.

End quote from al-Awsat (2/194).

With regard to what is reported from some of the early generations that they prayed in churches, perhaps those churches were free of images.

Ibn Rajab (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Ibn al-Mundhir and others narrated a condcession allowing that – i.e., praying in churches – from a number of scholars including Abu Moosa, al-Hasan, ash-Shu'bi, an-Nakha'i, 'Umar ibn

‘Abd al-‘Azeez, al-Awzaa‘i, and Sa‘eed ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azeez, and this view was favoured by Ibn al-Mundhir.

However most of that which has been narrated from the early generations concerning that has to do with individual cases that cannot be general in application. Therefore it is possible to interpret them as referring to churches in which there were no images.

End quote from Fath al-Baari (3/241).

With regard to the report that was quoted as evidence by Ibn Qudaamah (may Allah have mercy on him), when he said:

Ibn ‘Aa’idh narrated in Futooh ash-Shaam that when ‘Umar came to Greater Syria, the Christians made some food for him and invited him, and he said: Where is it? They said: In the church. So he refused to go, and he said to ‘Ali: Go with the people, and let them eat lunch. So ‘Ali went with the people and they entered the church, and he and the Muslims ate lunch. ‘Ali looked at the images and said: What blame would there be on Ameer al-Mu’mineen [i.e., ‘Umar] if he came in and ate? This is indicative of their unanimous agreement on the permissibility of entering churches when there are images in them. End quote from al-Mughni (10/203),

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) mentioned this report in his book Ighaathat al-Lahfaan (1/290), and the commentator on the book made a comment on it which indicates that the report is da‘eef (weak), as he said:

Ibn Qudaamah attributed this to Ibn ‘Aa’idh in Futooh ash-Shaam. It was narrated by Ibn ‘Asaakir in Taarekh Dimashq (42/6) via Ibn ‘Aa’idh from al-Waleed who said: ‘Abdullah ibn Ziyaad ibn Sam‘aan and Hishaam ibn Sa‘d told us from Naafi‘… And he narrated a similar story. But ‘Abdullah ibn Ziyaad is matrook (i.e., his hadith is rejected) and was accused of lying. End quote.

Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It should be noted that the words of ‘Umar clearly indicate that what some shaykhs do, of attending churches that are filled with images and statues, at the request of some people in

authority and others, is wrong.

End quote from Adaab az-Zafaaf (p. 165).

Secondly:

Another point that reinforces the prohibition on this matter is the fact that allowing children to enter churches in your situation is something for which there is no shar'i need whatsoever. At the same time, it may do a great deal of harm to their religious commitment, because at this age religious commitment is usually not yet fully established in children's hearts, so letting them become accustomed to entering churches may weaken the sense of al-wala' wal-bara' [loyalty to fellow Muslims and disavowal of disbelievers] in their hearts, may lead to a failure to resent disbelief and places of disbelief, and a failure to disavow it in one's heart, as we see among many of those who enter places where evils are committed. Frequently mixing with such people inevitably has an effect on the individual.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

We have seen that in the case of Jews and Christians who mix with the Muslims, their degree of disbelief is less than that of others. We have also seen that Muslims who mix a great deal with Jews and Christians are weaker in faith than others who mix only with Muslims.

End quote from Iqtida' as-Siraat al-Mustaqeem (1/488).

Conclusion:

It is makrooh to enter churches in which there are images and statues, and it is more emphatically makrooh – and may reach the point of being haraam – if entering those places will result in negative consequences and will not serve any significant shar'i interest.

And Allah knows best.