The Campaign Against Religion and the Promotion of Atheism in the Soviet Union

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Introduction

All founders of communism are known for their negative attitude toward religion and their adherence to atheism. One of the first steps taken by the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution was the separation of religion from the state, and throughout its entire existence, Soviet power actively waged a struggle against religion. It can even be argued that, in the eyes of many, the atheist identity of the Soviet Union was more salient than its egalitarian one. Moreover, in Azerbaijan there persists a perception that the Soviet state's attitude toward religion was directed specifically against us, our faith, and our customs.

In reality, the communists' negative stance toward religion was not aimed at any particular faith; rather, they rejected all religions, considering them remnants of a past that had to be eradicated. However, the intensity and methods of the struggle against religion shifted multiple times throughout the history of the Soviet Union. At first, the Bolsheviks sought to destroy religion as a political force, and they succeeded in this endeavor—but did not stop there. In the subsequent period, the authorities attempted to eliminate religion from daily life and create an "atheist society." In the end, however, people distanced themselves not only from religion but also from communist ideology.

This article examines the attitude of Marxist classics toward religion, the history of the Soviet Union's struggle against religion, and how the objectives and methods of this struggle evolved both during the revolutionary period and after the

establishment of Soviet power. Furthermore, it aims to analyze the successes and failures of this campaign, as well as the underlying reasons for these failures.

Religion and Atheism in Marxist Theory

Perhaps the most famous quotation by Karl Marx regarding religion is the phrase "religion is the opium of the people." Taken from Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844), this quotation was truncated during the Soviet period to the shortened version cited above and subjected to the same process of sloganization that much of Marx's corpus experienced. Arguably, the reason for this truncation lies in the fact that Marx's full assessment actually conveys a certain degree of sympathy toward religion—or rather, it acknowledges the indispensable role religion plays in an unjust world: "Religious suffering is at the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."[i]

Moreover, the founders of Marxism did not reject religion as a phenomenon with a reactionary character under all historical periods and conditions. Marx and Engels were of the view that religions, particularly in their early stages of development, constituted movements of the lower classes. In *On the History of Early Christianity* (1895), Engels emphasizes the parallels between the early history of Christianity and the modern workers' movement: "Both Christianity and socialism promise salvation in the future, liberation from bondage and misery. Christianity promises this salvation after death, in heaven; socialism offers this—worldly salvation through the transformation of society."[ii] In general, a significant difference can be observed between Marx and Engels in their treatment of religion. Marx, who discusses religion primarily in his early works, tends to situate it within the framework of social alienation. Engels, by contrast, returned repeatedly to the subject throughout his life and was more inclined to

draw attention to its emancipatory potential.[iii]

Marx never devoted a separate work exclusively to religion, but this does not mean that he regarded it an insignificant matter. On the contrary, Marx considered "the criticism of religion [to be] the prerequisite of all criticism."[iv] In Marx's theory, religion is treated as a form of ideology—"false consciousness"[v]—and understood as part of the superstructure, a reflection of the prevailing economic relations.[vi] Ideology and religion, like a *camera obscura*, present the world to people in an inverted and distorted form[vii]. The demand for "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people," Marx argued, "is the demand for their real happiness." In other words, "to call on people to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions."[viii]

Accordingly, Marx argued that the struggle against religion had to be waged not by directly attacking the Church, but by transforming the economic relations that made religion necessary. In another well-known formulation from *The German Ideology* (1844–46), he wrote that it is "not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness," therefore, without changing the material conditions, it would be impossible to bring about any decisive transformation of consciousness.[ix]

Moreover, Marx considered the efforts of utopian socialists, anarchists like Bakunin, and in general the proponents of "abstract atheism," who believed that society could be transformed through mere enlightenment, not only shallow and futile but even harmful. The working class, he argued, had to acquire class consciousness under the influence of material conditions; the approach of liberating people from superstition through the propaganda of an educated elite could not succeed.[x]

For Marx, religion was not merely a passive reflection of

economic relations but an active component of them. The Church was interested in preserving the existing state of inequality not only for theological reasons but also for purely economic ones. In the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, he famously remarked that "the Church will more readily pardon an attack on 38 of its 39 Articles than on one thirty-ninth of its income."[xi]

Indeed, as Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, capitalism itself, together with the destruction of the old society, shakes the very foundations of religion, unleashes revolutionary transformations, strips sacred values of their halo, and ultimately reduces everything to "naked economic relations," turning everyone into either a capitalist or a wage laborer.[xii] What remained, then, was to replace these unjust economic relations with new ones. Hence, the task of revolutionary theory could not be merely to understand society—or religion—but to change it: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change [through revolutionary struggle] it."[xiii]

Thus, Marx and the Marxists believed that religion would gradually lose its significance and eventually disappear as society progressed. It is important to note, however, that while the most organized campaigns against religion were associated with communist regimes, Marx himself did not express any particularly original views regarding the future fate of religion. With a few rare exceptions, nearly all thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed that religion was destined to decline inevitably. In the social sciences, this view—known as the secularization thesis—was treated almost as an axiom until quite recently.[xiv]

Vladimir Lenin, who was not only a theorist but above all a practical revolutionary, discussed the attitude of Social Democrats toward religion specifically within the framework of practical revolutionary struggle in his 1906 article *Socialism*

and Religion, written during the First Russian Revolution. Repeating Marx's famous phrase, Lenin described religion as "the opium of the people" and as a "spiritual fetter."[xv] However, he focused primarily on the stance that the workers' party should adapt to religion. According to Lenin, the state should treat religion as a private matter of the individual. The state, he argued, must sever all connections with religion and religious institutions; all state institutions and legislation had to be cleansed of religious remnants, and all citizens had to be free either to profess any faith or to profess none at all.[xvi]

However, "when it comes to the party of the socialist proletariat, religion cannot be regarded as a private matter."[xvii] Although Lenin emphasized that every communist must be an atheist, he opposed making atheism a formal requirement for revolutionaries or including it as a plank in the party program. For Lenin, the struggle against religion could not be waged by propaganda alone; the best way to free workers from the illusion of a "heaven in the skies" was to work toward "building heaven on earth."[xviii] Thus, only the proletarian revolution could truly transform religion into a private matter.The society established by this revolution, through its material achievements, would undermine and ultimately shake the very ground that gave life to religion.

Thus, contrary to a widespread assumption, atheism and the struggle against religion were neither the central nor the most important principles of communist ideology prior to the October Revolution, nor were they treated as issues of primary importance in the works of the Marxist classics. For Marxists, religion was merely one among many ideological apparatuses serving the interests of the ruling class and was not to be combated primarily through active propaganda. Religion, they believed, would lose its power with the dissolution of class society. This optimism, however, meant that the Bolsheviks entered the post-revolutionary struggle against religion largely unprepared. As Soviet experience would demonstrate,

this confidence proved overly naive. As we shall see below, after the revolution—particularly in the context of the struggle against counterrevolution—Lenin substantially revised these earlier views, and propaganda became the principal method of combating religion throughout the entire existence of the Soviet Union.

The Early Post-Revolutionary Years of the Struggle Against Religion

In the aftermath of the revolution, the Soviet government was compelled to revise its methods, instruments, and even its objectives in the struggle against religion several times. In the scholarly literature on the subject, different authors classify Soviet history in varying ways. The periodization I propose here is, of course, provisional and is intended merely to facilitate the tracing of the development of events. In short, in this article I divide the Soviet state's campaign against religion into three periods: the early years following the revolution, the Stalin era, and the post-Stalin era.

Shortly after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks began taking concrete steps against religion. The *Decree on Land* (26 October 1917), adopted immediately after the revolution, nationalized all lands owned by churches and monasteries. On 18 December of the same year, the *Decree on Civil Marriage, Children, and the Registration of Civil Status* established a secular bureaucratic institution—the Civil Status Registration Office (*Zapis' Aktov Grazhdanskogo Sostoyaniya*, ZAGS)—thus transferring the registration of marriage, divorce, birth, and death from religious authorities to the state.[xix] The *Decree on the Separation of Church from State and School from Church* of 23 January (5 February) 1918 abolished all privileges of the church, stripped it of the right to own property and of its status as a legal entity.[xx] (In Azerbaijan, a similar decree was issued in May 1920 following the Bolsheviks' rise to power. According to this decree, the Ministry of Religion was abolished, and citizens were granted the freedom to believe in any religion—or none at all—as well as the right to

engage in propaganda either in favor of or against religion.)[xxi] Furthermore, Article 13 of the first Constitution of Soviet Russia (1918) also proclaimed "the separation of church from state and school from church" and guaranteed "complete freedom of conscience for all citizens."[xxii]

Religious institutions, of course, did not remain passive in the face of these measures and joined the struggle against the revolution. Even before the announcement of the decree on the separation of church and state, Patriarch Tikhon had symbolically condemned the leaders of the revolution, anathematizing them for their "attacks on the Church and bloody policy of terror."[xxiii]

The resistance of religion to Soviet measures, combined with the outbreak of the Civil War, quickly intensified this confrontation and led Lenin and the Bolsheviks to abandon their earlier optimism that religion would wither away once deprived of its material base. Lenin before the revolution had argued that the struggle against religion could not be carried out merely through propaganda, but he after the revolution came to the conclusion that "the dissemination among the masses of every kind of anti-religious knowledge of a scientific and popular character by means of propaganda" was of indispensable importance for achieving the goals of the revolution.[xxiv] In his 1922 article *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*, the revolutionary leader stressed that "to think that the masses can be freed from this darkness solely by means of Marxist education is one of the greatest and most fatal errors a revolutionary can commit."[xxv] Atheist propaganda, therefore, had to be comprehensive and make use of science itself as an instrument in the struggle against religion.

Lenin's views on the inadvisability of including atheism as a formal principle in the party program also changed significantly after the revolution. At the 8th Congress of the

Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) [РК(б)П], held on 18–23 March 1919, the party program adopted by the congress stated in Article 13 that the party would "not be satisfied with the decree on the separation of church and state… [but would work toward] the complete severance of the connection between the exploiting classes and religious propaganda[…] and the organization of the broadest possible educational and propaganda measures against religion."[xxvi] The congress not only made unconditional atheism a requirement for every party member but also demanded that all communists actively participate in spreading atheism among the masses.[xxvii]

Achieving this goal, however, would prove far from simple. In the first years after the revolution, the Central Committee continued to receive letters from local organizations asking for guidance on how to deal with party members who were still religious.[xxviii]

The 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (8–16 March 1921) called for "the organization of large-scale anti-religious propaganda and the acceleration of propaganda among the broad working masses by means such as the mass press, other printed materials, and cinema." In August of the same year, the Party's Central Committee (ЦК) adopted a document specifying the conditions under which religious believers could be admitted to the party. This document drew a distinction between educated and uneducated believers. Individuals who held any position in a religious institution, as well as "intellectuals who refused to devote themselves entirely to educational work," were barred from party membership. Illiterate peasant and worker believers, however, could be admitted to the party "in exceptional cases, provided they had proved their loyalty to communism in difficult circumstances."[xxix]

However, all of this did not mean that the Bolsheviks had reached a unanimous consensus on what policy toward religion should be pursued or by what methods. For example, one of the

leaders of the revolution, Lev Trotsky, continued to maintain—just as he had before the revolution—that religion did not pose a particularly serious obstacle and that its appeal derived largely from its "ornate rituals." According to Trotsky, cinema, for instance, could serve as a substitute for precisely this aspect of religion. There were also disagreements among revolutionary leaders regarding how harshly religious institutions should be treated. Lenin favored a relatively restrained approach toward religious organizations, their leaders, and their property, whereas the People's Commissar for Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky, advocated for a hard and uncompromising struggle.[xxx]

Yet despite these divergences, a relentless struggle against religion was waged by all available means. Over time, this struggle became increasingly severe, and religion—once regarded merely as an obstacle to progress and enlightenment—came to be treated as a direct enemy of the revolutionary government.[xxxi]

During this period, the authorities also found themselves confronted with a new phenomenon: reformist religion. Whereas before the revolution the primary target had been orthodox religion, from the 1920s onward most religious groups began to rapidly adapt their doctrines to the new conditions. Moreover, as it became increasingly clear that the Bolsheviks would emerge victorious in their struggle against their opponents, these groups sought to demonstrate that they were not hostile to the revolution or its values.

In the first years after the revolution, the Bolsheviks had attempted to support heterodox sects persecuted by the empire as one branch of their struggle against orthodoxy, and had taken a more tolerant stance toward reformist religious groups.[xxxii] However, from this point onward, the Soviet authorities began to view such movements as at least as dangerous as orthodox religion and called upon "militant atheists" not to be deceived by their appearance.[xxxiii]

Although the methods and objectives of the campaign against religion would shift several times throughout Soviet history, the phenomenon of reformist religion remained one of the key factors that consistently troubled authorities.

In general, as time went on, it became clear that religious sentiment of the population would resist with far greater force than had been anticipated, compelling the Soviet authorities to further refine their methods of struggle. Consequently, beginning as early as the first half of the 1920s, special institutions and publications were established to carry the main burden of anti-religious propaganda.

Militants and Temples of Atheism

A few years after the revolution, it had become clear to everyone that religion would remain a source of trouble for a long time. The Bolsheviks therefore recognized the necessity of active propaganda against religion and adjusted their approach accordingly. The most fertile spaces for anti-religious and atheist propaganda (as well as for public education in general) were the new Soviet venues such as reading rooms, cultural clubs, and anti-religious museums.[xxxiv]

One of the signs of this shift in approach was the launch, during this period, of the first Soviet publication devoted entirely to anti-religious propaganda – the journal *Revolution and Church* (Революция и Церковь).[xxxv] In the following years, the number of such publications continued to grow rapidly, and in 1922 a dedicated publishing house, *Atheist* (Атеист), was established, focusing primarily on printing works by "bourgeois atheists."[xxxvi]

In 1921, the newspaper *Bezbozhnik* (Безбожник, "The Godless") also began publication. This newspaper would serve for many years as the leading press organ of atheist propaganda. Around this publication was formed the *Society of Friends of the Newspaper Bezbozhnik* (Общество друзей газеты «Безбожник»),

which in 1925 merged with the Moscow Society of the Godless at its first congress to create the *Society of the Godless* (Союз безбожников). At this founding congress, the society adopted the slogan: "The struggle against religion is the struggle for socialism."[xxxvii]

The congress also decided to establish another publication, *Antireligionist* (Антирелигиозник), the official organ of the Central Council of the Union. In the years that followed, this journal would become the main platform for internal debates within the organization. The conflict largely played out between the more "left-leaning" Moscow group and Stalin's close associate Y. M. Yaroslavsky, culminating in the victory of the Stalinist wing at the second congress.[xxxviii]

At this second congress, convened in 1929, the society was renamed the *League of the Militant Godless* (Союз воинствующих безбожников).[xxxix] By the second half of the 1930s, the league boasted over five million members – a number even greater than that of the Communist Party itself.[xl]

With the victory of Yaroslavsky's (and, by extension, Stalin's) faction, the league became one of the instruments of the repressive struggle against religion and took an active part in the campaign of persecution targeting religious institutions and clergy throughout the 1930s. Although the organization formally continued to exist until 1947, it effectively lost its significance after the wartime "truce" with religion had been declared.

Another institution established by the Bolsheviks as part of their specifically anti-religious educational activities was the network of anti-religious museums. These museums (sometimes referred to as Museums of the History of Religion) operated under the jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment (Наркомпрос) and were most often housed in former places of worship that had been confiscated from religious organizations. Their exhibits typically consisted of

anti-religious propaganda materials (such as posters) as well as objects used in various religious rituals.[xli]

Another space used by the Soviet authorities both to combat religion and to promote scientific knowledge was the **planetarium**. The first planetarium in the Soviet Union was opened in Moscow in 1929. Its creation was based on a proposal by the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment (Наркомпрос), which emphasized the "necessity of establishing new types of educational institutions," and it operated under the commissariat's authority. In the following years, similar venues were opened in the country's major cities. These spaces were meant to promote a scientific worldview, acquaint people with the achievements of science, and host "scientific performances" that would take the place of religious rituals.[xlii]

Religion in Everyday Life

The Bolsheviks understood that all these measures and innovations would not have an immediate impact on people's daily lives. Even if religious institutions were deprived of all their power, public space was cleansed of religion, and the scientific worldview prevailed, it would still take considerable time to create the new type of Soviet person. Trotsky, in an article written as early as 1920, acknowledged that daily life and traditions were sluggish and stubborn, and that changing them would be more difficult than achieving political change.[xliii] Thus, as the Bolsheviks explicitly stated, their aim was not merely to create a secular society and push religion into the private sphere, but also to achieve revolutionary transformations in matters related to daily life (быт), such as marriage, death, birth, and so on. Trotsky understood that it would not be possible simply to remove various rituals and ceremonies performed in the church, or icons hanging on the wall, without offering the people something to replace them. For this reason, the Soviet authorities had to create their own new rituals.[xliv]

In fact, even before the war, the Bolsheviks had taken certain steps to achieve this. Changes to the registration of civil status and the construction of a crematorium in Moscow in 1927,[xlv] aimed at getting rid of traditional funeral ceremonies, were of this kind. However, more significant steps in this area would be taken after the war.

Atheism and Religion in the Stalin Era

Toward the end of the 1920s, as Stalin consolidated power and became the sole authority in the country, a new stage in the struggle against religion began. With the adoption of the new *Law on Religious Associations* in April 1929, virtually all forms of religious activity were restricted, and religious organizations were deprived of the right to engage in any activity other than the performance of rituals (such as charity work, education, etc.). Under this law, all monasteries were also closed, and the registration of religious communities was made more difficult.[xlvi]

With the Soviet government's abandonment of the New Economic Policy and transition to collectivization, economic pressure on religious institutions also increased. According to the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of 21 May 1929, religious organizations were effectively classified as kulaks and subjected to an extremely heavy tax burden.[xlvii] By the late 1920s, as forced collectivization gained momentum, measures taken against religion also became more severe. The announcement of the First Five-Year Plan (1928–1932) likewise signaled a new stage in the struggle against religion, as one of the plan's goals was the creation of a "Godless society." In many cases, the establishment of a collective farm in a given locality was symbolically initiated by closing the local house of worship, which provoked resistance. For this reason, on 14 March 1930, the party was compelled to issue a decree "on the avoidance of excesses in the struggle against religion."[xlviii]

In other words, despite all these institutions engaged in

atheist propaganda and the cultural events organized for this purpose, the Soviet authorities continued to fight religion mainly through bureaucratic methods. This type of struggle was not limited to harsh repressive measures. For example, in 1929 the center demanded from all local offices that no holidays be granted in schools or workplaces on any religious feast or commemorative day, and that official holidays should not coincide with religious ones.[xlix]

The announcement of the Second Five-Year Plan (1933–1937) was accompanied by an even harsher campaign. Among the plan's objectives was the "complete liquidation of capitalist elements and classes." From the mid-1930s onward, the intensification of political struggle and Stalinist terror did not spare religious organizations, and by the end of the decade, the clergy had been almost completely annihilated.[l]

Nevertheless, this did not signify the complete eradication of religion by the authorities. The 1937 census showed that religion was still a part of Soviet society. At Stalin's direct initiative, a religion item was added to the census questionnaire, and the results showed that, overall, 56,17 percent of Soviet citizens – and two-thirds in the provinces – were believers.[li]

During this period, Article 124 of the Stalin Constitution, adopted in 1936, granted "all citizens the right to perform religious rites." However, although this article mentioned the right to conduct anti-religious propaganda, it said nothing about religious propaganda.[lii] Thus, while proclaiming that religion was separate from the state and that freedom of conscience was guaranteed, the Soviet authorities still confirmed the right to proselytize as a special privilege reserved for atheists.

Yet as the war with fascism approached, and as Stalin – partly to counter the progressive views that had dominated after the revolution and partly to win the support of the uneducated

strata of society and especially the peasantry – turned toward traditional values, the attitude toward religion also changed to a certain extent.

As the Soviet Union gradually renounced its internationalist face and pursued Stalin's socialism in one state, religion likewise began to be regarded as a part of Soviet identity. From this time onward, the Russian tsars and emperors, previously portrayed as tyrants, began to be depicted in more favorable colors, and articles appeared in the Soviet press emphasizing the positive role of Christianity in the unification of Russia.[liii] The Soviet Union was preparing for war.

After the war began, the authorities gradually realized that they would have to adopt a more conciliatory approach toward religion. This shift in position was connected both to the fact that the Nazis were exploiting religion in the occupied territories (for example, by reopening churches) against the Soviet Union, and to the negative impact that religious repressions were having on the Soviet Union's image among its allies. It was also linked to the renewed awakening of religious feelings among the population under harsh wartime conditions and the recognition by the authorities that religion could be useful in mobilizing people. Moreover, all events showed that the majority of believers were voluntarily demonstrating patriotic behavior in this war. Indeed, after Germany's attack on the USSR, Metropolitan bishop Sergius addressed the people even before Stalin did.[liv]

Already from the first years of the war, a considerable number of houses of worship were being reopened for services, reflecting both the leadership's intention to make use of the ideological power of religion in the war effort and the demands coming from local communities.

However, more significant changes occurred toward the end of the war. As a first step in this direction, in September 1943

the *Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church* (Совет по делам Русской православной церкви) was established, followed by the creation of similar bodies in other parts of the Union.[lv] In May 1944, the bureaucratic apparatus tasked with regulating the state's relations with religious organizations, the *Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults* (Совет по делам религиозных культов), was founded.[lvi] Thus, after many years, the Soviet authorities once again came to regard religion as a legitimate interlocutor.

It appears that the initiator of these changes was Stalin himself, which in a certain sense indicated that the Soviet leader had concluded that religion was no longer a counterrevolutionary force. Of course, it might have seemed contradictory to claim, on the one hand, that socialism had triumphed in the country, and on the other, to take a step backward in the attitude toward religion – which by now should have been on the verge of disappearing. However, by this time Stalin had long since neutralized all his rivals, especially those who had the potential and the courage to highlight such theoretical contradictions. Moreover, under the new conditions, it was clear that religion would be a submissive servant dependent on the state.

In general, for Stalin, the preservation of political power and the practical results of the steps taken were more important than loyalty to ideology. This trait clearly distinguished Stalin both from his predecessors and from his successor. When it seemed more advantageous to make use of religion rather than to wage a harsh struggle against it, Stalin decided to create relatively milder conditions for the religious institutions which only a few years earlier had been crushed through severe repression.

One of the signs of this change in approach was the dissolution of the League of the Militant Godless (Союз воинствующих безбожников) in 1947, at a time when religion continued to strengthen its position after the war, and the

establishment of its successor, the All-Union Society "Znanie" (Всесоюзное общество «Знание»). Unlike its predecessor, this new organization was intended primarily to disseminate scientific knowledge and engage in educational and enlightenment activities in general.[lvii] Overall, there were no signs of a change in the official ideological stance toward religion, but in practice militant atheists were somewhat pushed into the background. From the end of the war until Stalin's death, efforts to spread atheism had almost disappeared.[lviii] For Khrushchev, who succeeded Stalin, however, atheism would hold much greater significance.

After Stalin

Based on evidence such as the revenues of religious organizations, the number of participants in religious rites, and other indicators, the Soviet authorities could see that religion was experiencing a revival among the population after the war. For Nikita Khrushchev, who emerged victorious in the struggle for power following Stalin's death, this data served as a warning signal. Therefore, from the very first years of his rule, the new leader would declare war on the "remnants of the old regime."[lix]

Although Khrushchev is best known in Soviet history for reforms aimed at relatively improving living standards and promoting liberalization, when it came to religion, he was an advocate of a stricter line than his predecessor. Khrushchev's political platform was not limited to dealing with Stalin's legacy; it also contained goals that defined the future path the Soviet Union was to follow. The new (third) party program, adopted at the 22nd Party Congress (17–31 October 1961), proclaimed that the country had entered the stage of "building communism." At this new stage, the party demanded that citizens restore ideological purity, strengthen discipline, and work to ensure material progress. Restoring ideological purity also included the renewal of the struggle against religion. In his opening speech at the congress, Khrushchev stated that "it will not be possible to lead a person burdened

with capitalist prejudices to communism" and that "it is necessary to free people from the burden of the past."[lx]

Thus, new attacks were to be launched against religion, which, following Stalin's reconciliation with the Church in 1943, had again become part of Soviet life. Such attacks had begun even before the official milestone of de-Stalinization – the 20th Party Congress – and by 1954 various party bodies were already submitting reports to the higher authorities warning that religion was reaching dangerous levels in the country. For example, the 1954 report of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults noted that the press had removed atheist propaganda from its agenda, that atheist agitation was virtually absent, and that religious holidays were significantly disrupting labor discipline in many localities.[lxi]

Taking all this into account, as well as other signs that religion had strengthened its presence in society during the decade since the war's end, the party leadership launched a new wave of atheist propaganda as early as 1954. These first attacks, usually referred to in the historical literature as the "one-hundred-day campaign," seemed to Soviet citizens to start and stop abruptly, but in their methods and style they resembled the much larger campaign that would begin a few years later.[lxii]

Khrushchev's large-scale offensive against religion began with two decisions adopted in October 1958. On 4 October, the Central Committee sent a confidential document to local organs identifying shortcomings in anti-religious activity, and on 16 October, a decision of the Council of Ministers imposed a heavier tax burden on religious organizations.[lxiii]

On the other hand, during the Khrushchev era, the target of the struggle against religion – or rather, the aspect of religion that was to be eradicated – changed once again. If Stalin had succeeded in destroying religion as a political

force, under Khrushchev the attack was directed against religion in everyday life.[lxiv] This shift in focus was not without cause: Reports from agencies monitoring religious communities indicated that after the war there was an increase in the number of people participating in religious marriages, funerals, and baptismal ceremonies, as well as a rise in the number of young people practicing religious rites.[lxv]

Although leadership intended to fight the problem of religiosity among young people primarily through education, this approach did not produce the desired results. In schools, teachers either refused to conduct atheist propaganda altogether or did not attach sufficient importance to this task. Moreover, even if children received atheist education in school, at home they were exposed to entirely opposite influences from their parents or grandparents.

In 1959, the compulsory course *Foundations of Scientific Atheism* was introduced into the curriculum of all higher education institutions. However, this step also failed to deliver the expected results. Another problem that emerged at this point was the lack of qualified personnel: The teachers assigned to teach this course generally possessed very superficial knowledge of religion.[lxvi]

As a result, the campaign once again relied mainly on administrative measures. As part of these measures, on 28 November 1958 the party adopted a resolution entitled *On Measures to Restrict Pilgrimages to So-Called Holy Sites*. Following this resolution, shrines belonging to various religions across the country were either destroyed or converted into summer camps or livestock farms, and (mostly uneducated) clergy who offered religious services to pilgrims at such sites were punished.[lxvii] Another resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers, adopted on 16 March 1961, prohibited clergy from receiving payment from the population for their services, effectively turning them into salaried state employees. The authorities believed that this measure

would deprive religious figures of their motivation to perform more rites.[lxviii]

However, even these administrative measures failed to achieve the desired outcome. On the contrary, such actions made religion even more visible in public space. Consequently, these measures were gradually abandoned, and with Khrushchev's retirement, the next wave of attacks against religion came to an end. In fact, with his removal from power, the campaign he had launched stopped almost abruptly. Even several major publications of the USSR Academy of Sciences specializing in the study of religion and atheism ceased operation in 1964.[lxix]

With the rise of Brezhnev to power, the intensity of attacks against religion diminished, yet this period can be considered significant in terms of the transition of scientific atheism to a qualitatively new stage. In 1963, Brezhnev declared that "the social roots of religion had been completely eradicated and that only enlightenment and education were now needed to be rid of it entirely." Shortly thereafter, in 1964, the Institute of Scientific Atheism (Институт Научного Атеизма) was established under the Academy of Social Sciences.[lxx] Mass-oriented atheist propaganda, however, entered a stage of decline. After Khrushchev, there was a noticeable decrease in the number of atheist lectures (mostly organized by the Knowledge Society (Общество «Знание»)), in the number of publications on the subject in the Soviet press, as well as in the number and print runs of books on atheism.[lxxi]

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the attitude of the state or the party toward religion had changed. For example, the program adopted at the XXIV Party Congress demanded that members "wage an uncompromising struggle against every form of bourgeois ideology." At the same time, however, a certain softening could be observed at least in the style and language of atheist propaganda. This very softening – along with the decrease in anti-religious work noted above – was criticized

by some circles within the party.[lxxii]

One of the main reasons for the more tolerant attitude toward religion during the Brezhnev era was that the leadership saw religion as the last consolation of the lower classes in the face of the horrors of war and other social problems.[lxxiii] Another, and in my view more important, reason was that by this period both the leadership and the population had developed a sense of indifference toward ideology. Khrushchev had been the last leader who truly believed in the Soviet project.

Even though the Soviet leadership made one last attempt in the mid-1970s to intensify the struggle against religion and revive the campaign for atheism, it failed to achieve the desired results.[lxxiv] In fact, the celebration of the millennial anniversary of the Christianization of Kievan Rus' in 1988 marked the Soviet government's renunciation of its ideal of an atheist society. Gorbachev's *perestroika*, like many other elements of the Soviet project, led to the abandonment of atheism. In reality, Gorbachev had no pre-planned or formally announced policy of liberalization regarding religion, and when he came to power he had declared that "religion remains one of the obstacles on the road to communism." At the XXVII Party Congress (February 1986), he even criticized certain institutions and his predecessors for "negligence in the struggle against religion."[lxxv] Moreover, during this period, atheist propaganda and the work of the institutions responsible for it continued as usual. Therefore, Gorbachev's decision in April 1988 to receive the Patriarch, and his subsequent authorization of the anniversary celebrations, came as a surprise to everyone.[lxxvi] The jubilee, held during the week of 5–12 June 1988, was accompanied by solemn ceremonies and marked in the most prestigious venues with the participation of high-ranking officials of the Union. A year later, as the clearest sign of religion's return to public life, a large number of clergies were elected to the Congress of People's Deputies.[lxxvii]

In the following years, the Communist Party gradually abandoned its plans to create an atheist society, and by 1991 the party itself, the institutions responsible for promoting atheism, and the very project of scientific atheism had all passed into history.

Scientific Atheism

Although the term atheism was occasionally used together with the epithet scientific from the earliest years of Soviet rule, scientific atheism was primarily a phenomenon of the postwar Soviet period. The reason why Soviet authorities and intellectuals added the designation "scientific" to atheism, in order to distinguish the Soviet version of atheism from bourgeois atheism[lxxviii] – and, as we shall see below, defined it as a science – should be sought in the modernization project of which the Soviet experience itself was a component. For intellectuals who believed in modernization and progress, science was the only legitimate and valuable system of knowledge, and any knowledge that was unscientific or obtained by unscientific methods had to be rejected without hesitation. Engels's classification of Marxism, in contrast to earlier socialist currents, as "scientific socialism" likewise stemmed from this outlook.[lxxix]

In Soviet literature, scientific atheism was understood not merely as the absence of belief in any religion or supernatural power,[lxxx] but also as a "science that studies the phenomenon of religion and its various manifestations."[lxxxi] All spheres over which religion claimed authority – nature, society, morality, and so on – formed the subject matter of scientific atheism.[lxxxii] In other words, scientific atheism was "a system of materialist views that, on the basis of the achievements of the sciences, refutes every kind of religious view and conception."[lxxxiii] Moreover, "the subject of scientific atheism is the study of the laws of the origin, development, and elimination of religion, the history of atheist doctrines, the transition

from the religious worldview to the scientific-materialist worldview, and the laws governing the formation of atheist conviction."[lxxxiv]

The clearest example of the Soviet propaganda apparatus's efforts to use the achievements of science against religion can be seen in the Soviet Union's adventure in space. The conquest of space was interpreted in the USSR as "the victory of communism over religion." In a well-known propaganda poster familiar to all, Y. Gagarin is depicted as telling Soviet citizens that he had not encountered God in space. (In fact, Gagarin never uttered this phrase; it was G. Titov, the second person to travel into space, who made such a remark in an interview with the foreign press.)[lxxxv] The space race was as important for the Soviet Union as it was for demonstrating the falsity of religious conceptions of the universe. Soviet publications interpreted the ability of humans to travel into space as proof that the world was not as described in the sacred books.[lxxxvi]

In general, various arguments about the superiority of atheism over religion can be found in Soviet literature (such as religion being opposed to progress, serving the interests of the ruling classes, and so forth), but religion was rejected primarily because it was seen as contradicting the findings of the natural sciences. In the Khrushchev era (1959), the arsenal of scientific atheism propaganda was supplemented by the journal *Science and Religion* (Наука и Религия), which within a few years reached a print run of 100.000, as well as by lectures on atheism and popular science organized by the *Society of Knowledge* and other similar activities – all of which were aimed at using science for this purpose.[lxxxvii]

However, despite the inclusion of scientific atheism in the curricula of all higher education institutions in 1959 and the establishment of the Institute of Scientific Atheism in 1964, until the very end of its existence the Soviet authorities suffered from a shortage of personnel capable of carrying out

atheist propaganda. The main problem was that atheist propagandists possessed only a very superficial knowledge of religions.[lxxxviii] Thus, as in the ideological sphere more generally, in the sphere of atheist propaganda the Soviet authorities were confronted with the growing alienation of both activists and their audiences from the messages delivered from above.

Atheism as a Worldview and a Way of Life

By declaring that the country had entered the stage of "building communism," Khrushchev was also proclaiming that the Soviet citizen, too, had to enter an entirely new stage. If the country was to construct a completely new social order, unprecedented in history, its citizens' worldview, morality, and values had to be freed from all remnants of the old world. In principle, the party had always preached that it was the bearer of such unique values; what was new in the Khrushchev era was the party's conviction that the time had finally come to eliminate the discrepancies between ideology and the realities of everyday life.[lxxxix]

The worldview of the Soviet person had to be a scientific worldview, which was usually described as the opposite of the religious worldview. The Soviet person was expected to base their understanding of the structure, origin, and laws of the universe on the knowledge offered by science and to reject what religion preached.[xc] The Soviet person was also required to answer the ancient question about the meaning of life in accordance with the scientific-materialist worldview: The meaning of life was not to gain paradise after death but to live a good and happy life in this world. When the communist was confronted with hardship or had to make sacrifices, he or she was to think about how to improve life – both their own and that of others.[xci]

Another question to which atheism had to respond was the possibility of morality without God. In Soviet literature it was asserted not only that morality without God was possible,

but also that atheist morality – being the product of progress – was superior to religious morality.[xcii] The principles of socialist morality were to be determined not by the commands of some supernatural being but by the interests of society and by collective social consciousness. Every Soviet person was expected to struggle for the happiness of others and to see the meaning of their own life in this struggle.[xciii]

One of the main objectives in the Khrushchev era was also the creation of new "socialist rituals" to replace religious rites and ceremonies. In fact, in the first years after the revolution, the registration of significant life events had already been taken away from religion, and campaigns had been organized to eliminate religious holidays from people's lives. The Bolsheviks, in general, regarded everyday rituals as meaningless remnants of the past and sought to remove solemn ceremonies from people's lives, with the exception of holidays connected to the history of the revolution.[xciv] Although attempts to create new ceremonies to replace religious ones had been made since the earliest years of the revolution, these attempts were unsuccessful, and with Stalin's abandonment of atheist propaganda, the project was dropped altogether.[xcv]

However, in the Khrushchev era the course shifted once again, and it was concluded that the "Soviet person on the road to communism" required new, atheist ceremonies. One of the main reasons for this was that sociological studies (as we shall see below) revealed that religious ceremonies still played a significant role in the life of the Soviet person and showed that the rate of participation in religious ceremonies – especially among young people – was quite high. Thus, since the authorities were unable simply to rid themselves of the remnants of the past, they decided to replace them with socialist ceremonies. In fact, the economic conditions at the time also prepared the ground for this initiative. The acceleration of urbanization during the Khrushchev era, the partial resolution of the housing problem, and the overall

rise in the living standards of the Soviet person – combined with the relatively liberal atmosphere created by de-Stalinization – allowed people to think about more than just basic necessities.

The first step in this area concerned the wedding ceremony. Although ZAGS (the Civil Registry Office) had been created shortly after the revolution, this office merely registered marriages and offered no socialist alternative for celebrating the wedding in a solemn manner. This issue was discussed at the XIII Congress of the Komsomol (15–18 April 1958), where the importance of a socialist wedding ceremony was emphasized. After the congress, the Komsomol and ZAGS began working jointly on this matter, and by the end of 1959 the first Soviet Palace of Happiness was opened.[xcvi]

In the following years, the Soviet authorities attempted to create their own alternatives not only for marriage but also for death, birth, and all significant moments of life. However, although these ceremonies were not directly rejected by the population, they did not achieve their intended purpose – in other words, they failed to replace religious rituals. Even in the most developed cities of the USSR, people did not regard socialist ceremonies as substitutes for religious rites; rather, they made use of the services of both the state and religion. In the provinces, people almost without exception continued to baptize or circumcise their children, contract religious marriages, and bid farewell to their deceased relatives with religious ceremonies.[xcvii]

In general, the Soviet authorities' attempts to secularize everyday life cannot be considered a complete failure. For example, people came to regard official civil registration as an essential condition of marriage. However, if the goal had been the complete abolition of religious ceremonies, the authorities had not achieved it.

At the same time, religious holidays that had been rejected as

relics of the past after the revolution gradually returned to Soviet life, and the state not only came to terms with their existence but even began to celebrate them solemnly. The May and October holidays, which were more valuable for the Soviet authorities, never truly became admired by the wider public festivities. In this regard, perhaps the only exception was the celebration of March 8, which – even in its distorted form – managed to take root in people's lives.

The Failure of the Atheist Society Project

The Soviet authorities were probably always aware that atheist propaganda was not sufficiently effective, but the true picture of the state of religion in the country became clear only after Stalin's death – when sociology, which during his era had been condemned as a "bourgeois science," was partially reintroduced into academia – and after the establishment of the Institute of Scientific Atheism.

Studies carried out in the 1960s by this institute and by the departments of Scientific Atheism in various universities showed that approximately 90 percent of the population in the provinces kept religious objects in their homes, and that even in industrial regions up to 60 percent of newborns were baptized. In one study, 87 percent of respondents (including those who said they were non-believers) declared that they participated in religious rituals.[xcviii] Religion thus remained a significant component of Soviet life, and it appeared that fifty years of atheist propaganda had not been very effective.

But how did the Soviet intelligentsia explain this fact? Marxist-Leninist theory held that religion, once deprived of its economic foundation, would disappear of its own accord, while the Soviet state claimed to be a classless, socialist society. For the Soviet intelligentsia, it was unacceptable to deny either of these two claims. Therefore, there had to be other reasons for the persistence of these "religious survivals."

In the atheist literature of the Soviet period, one can find a standard set of reasons offered to explain the persistence of "religious survivals." The first explanation that comes to mind was that religion played the role of an "opiate," as Marx had claimed. Indeed, some sociological studies conducted with believers showed that a significant proportion of those who joined religious communities were seeking consolation in religion as an escape from some difficulty in their lives.[xcix]

According to Soviet literature, another factor was the influence of the family, particularly of the elderly. It was argued that those whose childhoods had been spent in a religious environment – in other words, who had not received a socialist upbringing – exerted a negative influence on their children and grandchildren. Indeed, there was evidence showing that grandparents insisted on having their newborn grandchildren baptized.[c] Moreover, 35–50 percent of pensioners and 43–53 percent of housewives were believers. Since these groups were more actively involved in the upbringing of the younger generation, they were regarded as the carriers of religious survivals.[ci]

Other reasons included the power of tradition (people participated in rituals out of custom even if they did not truly believe), the deliberate influence of the capitalist world, the horrors of war, the insufficient level of education among part of the population, and the persistence of differences between town and countryside as well as between manual and intellectual labor.[cii]

The activities of religious institutions also prevented religion from disappearing. In response to all the achievements of science and the refutation of religion's claims, religion adapted to the new conditions, reinterpreting sacred texts and asserting that the findings of science were not in contradiction with religion. In other words, the modernization of religion and its adaptation to new

circumstances – as well as its refusal to concede that its claims about the universe had been disproven – made the struggle against it more difficult.[ciii]

Thus, religion stubbornly continued to exist. Were Marx and, indeed, nearly all the founders of the social sciences wrong about the fate of religion? The return of religion to the public sphere in many parts of the world since the last decades of the previous century, and the increasing visibility of religion in recent years, at first glance seem to suggest that the answer to this question is yes. Indeed, many sociologists who once maintained that progress would inevitably result in secularization and the decline of religion no longer support this claim.[civ]

However, public opinion surveys conducted at different times and on a global scale suggest that we should be cautious about rushing to reject the secularization thesis. Research does, in fact, show a correlation between the level of prosperity and lack of belief: In other words, in the majority of developed countries, the percentage of believers is low and continues to decline.[cv] In this regard, the only real exception is the United States. For this reason, in the sociology of religion it is argued that the factor influencing the decline of religion is not the general wealth of society or indicators such as a high GDP, but rather such aspects as the greater accessibility of social services, the provision of economic and other forms of security for individuals, and so forth (although there are also those who believe that the secularization thesis should be rejected entirely).[cvi]

Thus, the success of the struggle against religion in the Soviet Union must be evaluated through two different prisms. First, the failure of the Soviet authorities' project of scientific atheism should be explained in terms of the general failure of the Soviet project itself. In other words, if we are to test the hypothesis that religion will disappear in a classless society, the USSR is not a suitable laboratory for

such an experiment. The Soviet Union was not, as its rulers claimed, a classless society. Although private ownership of the means of production, in the capitalist sense, had been abolished, the system had generated its own forms of inequality. The party leaders had effectively become the owners of the country and of everything within it. Access to many freedoms, services, and goods was reserved only for a small segment of society – the upper echelons of the party and those favored by them. Under such conditions, it is not possible to claim that Marx's (and his contemporaries') assertion has been tested and disproven. As noted above, the weakening of religion's position in developed countries, despite the global religious revival of recent decades, allows us to say that the assertion remains at least partially valid. Of course, even in a society purged of all deprivation and inequality, it is not convincing to claim that religion would completely disappear. Nevertheless, there is sufficient reason to assert that in such a society religion would be significantly weakened. In other words, if we interpret Marx's prophecy not as "inevitable atheism" but as "inevitable secularization," it can be said that, despite the experience of communist regimes, this claim remains defensible.

On the other hand, the Soviet authorities had achieved Lenin's pre-revolutionary goal of "making religion a private matter." Religion had been removed from the public sphere, and its most social manifestations survived only in certain public ceremonies and holidays – and even these had lost their religious content. Religion was no longer the primary factor shaping the choices and decisions of the Soviet person in everyday life.

Moreover, although the Bolsheviks had initially believed that propaganda would not be a primary means of combating religion, over time they attempted to build both an atheist society and communism itself largely through administrative measures and propaganda. All of this led to the population – and especially the younger generation – becoming increasingly alienated from

ideology.[cvii] The population that the Soviet authorities sought to liberate from "harmful ideologies" eventually turned away from all forms of ideology, and this indifference played a greater role in the collapse of the Soviet regime than any rival ideology.

Conclusion

The founders of communism did not simply reject religion as a reactionary doctrine; they also regarded it as an ideology serving the interests of the ruling classes. In their view, religions would gradually disappear with the destruction of their economic basis – class society. For this reason, the task was not to fight religion through enlightenment campaigns, but to abolish the class society that constituted its foundation. Likewise, the leaders of the October Revolution declared even before the revolution that the party's first objective was to build a secular state and to make religion a matter of private concern for every individual. Once socialism was established, religion, along with the old classes, would pass into history.

After the revolution, however, it became clear that this question was more complicated than had been imagined. Although the Soviet authorities repeatedly changed their methods and objectives with respect to religion throughout their history, they were compelled to fight against religion until the very last years of the regime. This struggle was carried out through repression, other administrative measures, and atheist propaganda.

In fact, the Soviet authorities did succeed in achieving the goal of secularism and in pushing religion out of the public sphere. Yet the leadership was not content with neutralizing religion as a political force and strove to create an atheist society. This insistence stemmed partly from a misjudgment of the nature of religion and from a deterministic approach: if the social basis of religion had been eliminated in the Soviet country, then religion itself was expected to disappear. Even

if we were to accept that the Soviet Union was a society composed entirely of equals, this would not necessarily mean that no believers would remain. However, the Soviet Union was not a classless society, and its citizens still had need of religion to cope with the challenges they faced in their personal and social lives.

On other hand, the slogan-driven propaganda, repeated for decades, eventually lost all credibility and became an object of ridicule. Although the USSR officially recognized freedom of conscience and did not proclaim itself an atheist state, atheism was regarded as part of the established order, and therefore it shared the fate of Marxism in the country. The revolutionaries had wanted to imbue all workers with political consciousness, but the methods chosen and the actual conditions in the country ultimately led to indifference toward the official ideology.

The Bolsheviks wanted to build a society composed of non-believers; in the end, they built a society that believed in nothing.

Notes and References

[i] *Karl Marx, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, in Marx on Religion, ed. John Raines, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2002, p. 171*

[ii] Ibid., 217.

[iii] Roland Boer, *Opium, Idols and Revolution: Marx and Engels on Religion*, **Religion Compass** 5/11, Blackwell, Oxford, 2011, p. 699 (pp. 698–707). However, Engels did not see such potential in institutionalized religion. According to him, this potential existed in the early forms of religion, and reform movements that arose later in opposition to institutionalized religion could also have revolutionary

undertones, but institutionalized religion itself had become a tool of the ruling class. Together with Marx, Engels wrote in the *Manifesto* that "Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat" (p. 247). Indeed, in the Second World War era, movements of Liberation Theology that emerged in different parts of the world (especially in Latin America) would articulate demands similar to those of the Marxists and at times even join forces with them, whereas official religious institutions in most cases opposed these movements. For Liberation Theology, see: Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, Orbis Books, New York, 1988.

[iv] Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, p. 217.

[v] For a concise discussion of the concept of ideology in Marxist theory, see: Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, Verso, London, 1993.

[vi] For a more detailed discussion of Marx and Engels' views on religion, as well as the evaluation of different religions and secularization in Marxist theory, see: *Marx, Engels, and Marxisms: Marxism, Religion, and Emancipatory Politics*, edited by G. Kirkpatrick et al., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2022. For the place of religion in contemporary Western Marxism, see: Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology*, Brill, Boston, 2007.

[vii] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 99.

[viii] Ibid., 171.

[ix] Ibid., 100.

[x] For Marx's understanding of atheism and the specificity of his approach, see: Peter Thompson, "Marxism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, edited by Stephen Bullivant and Michael

Ruse, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 293–306.

[xi] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Penguin Classics, London, 1990, p. 92.

[xii] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Penguin Books, London, 2002, p. 223: "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."

[xiii] Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, Thesis XI, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm

[xiv] For a critical discussion of this thesis, see: José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994. For a defense of the secularization thesis in its revised and modified form, in light of current sociological data, see: Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011.

[xv] Ленин В. И., «Социализм и религия», *Полное собрание сочинений* (in 55 vols.), vol. 12, 5th ed., ИМЛ, Издательство Политической Литературы, Moscow, 1968, p. 142.

[xvi] Ibid., 143.

[xvii] Ibid., 145.

[xviii] Ibid., 146.

[xix] Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2018, p. 27.

[xx] İ.B. Berxin, SSRİ Tarixi, Maarif Nəşriyyatı, Bakı, 1977, p. 70.

[xxi] Azərbaycan Tarixi, yeddi cildə, 5-ci cild, Elm Nəşriyyatı, Bakı, 2008, p. 237.

[xxii] Ю. С. Кукушкин; О. И. Чистяков, *Очерк Истории Советской Конституции*, Издательство Политической Литературы, Moskva, 1987, p. 244.

[xxiii] Dimitry Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*, in 3 vols., vol. 1, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1987, p. 27.

[xxiv] Ibid., 28.

[xxv] Ленин В. И., «О значении воинствующего материализма», *Полное собрание сочинений* (in 55 vols.), vol. 45, 5th ed., ИМЛ, Издательство Политической Литературы, Moscow, 1964, pp. 23–33, p. 26.

[xxvi] Sovet İttifaqı Kommunist Partiyasının Tarixi, red. B.N. Ponomaryov, Azərnəşr, Baku, 1963, p. 334; Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. I, p. 28.

[xxvii] *Популярные лекции по атеизму*, edited by В. А. Карпушина, Издательство Политической Литературы, Moscow, 1965, p. 335.

[xxviii] Victoria Smolkin, p. 40.

[xxix] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, pp. 29–30.

[xxx] Ibid., p. 33-36

[xxxi] Jan Tesař, *The History of Scientific Atheism: A Comparative Study of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union (1954–1991)*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2019, pp. 47–48.

[xxxii] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, p. 28.

[xxxiii] Ibid., 52-67.

[xxxiv] Ibid., 34-35.

[xxxv] Jan Tesař, p. 44–45.

[xxxvi] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, p. 37.

[xxxvii] This slogan indicated how, in contrast to the pre-revolutionary theory, anti-religious propaganda had become of great importance to the Soviet regime.

[xxxviii] Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2008, pp. 6–7.

[xxxix] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, p. 37.

[xl] Victoria Smolkin, p. 50.

[xli] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, p. 35.

[xlii] Victoria Smolkin, pp. 35–36.

[xliii] Ibid., 36.

[xliv] Ibid., 37.

[xlv] Ibid., 35.

[xlvi] Paul Froese, pp. 97–98.

[xlvii] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, p. 44.

[xlviii] Victoria Smolkin, pp. 46–47.

[xlix] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, p. 56.

[l] Victoria Smolkin, p. 47.

[li] Ibid., p. 48. The questionnaire did not ask respondents about participation in religious rites or membership in any religious community; it merely inquired whether they were

believers. Nevertheless, the results were not to the regime's liking, and by the next census, conducted in 1939, the question regarding religion had been removed.

[lii] *Очерк Истории Советской Конституции*, p. 309.

[liii] Victoria Smolkin, p. 50

[liv] Ibid., 50-51

[lv] As part of this wave, on April 14, 1944, by decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Transcaucasia was established. *History of Azerbaijan*, in 7 vols., vol. 7, Elm Publishing House, Baku, 2008, p. 28.

[lvi] Victoria Smolkin, p. 51.

[lvii] Jan Tesař, pp. 77-78.

[lviii] Ibid., 72; 78.

[lix] Victoria Smolkin, pp. 58-59.

[lx] SovİKP tarixi, pp.793; 806.

[lxi] John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 6–7.

[lxii] Ibid., 7-11.

[lxiii] Victoria Smolkin, p. 74.

[lxiv] Ibid., 75-76.

[lxv] Ibid., 75.

[lxvi] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, pp. 77–79.

[lxvii] Victoria Smolkin, pp. 77-78.

[lxviii] Ibid., 78-79.

[lxix] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, p.98.

[lxx] John Anderson, p. 69.

[lxxi] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, pp. 100-105.

[lxxii] John Anderson, pp. 70-73.

[lxxiii] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, p.110.

[lxxiv] Ibid., 112-121.

[lxxv] Victoria Smolkin, p. 231.

[lxxvi] Ibid., 233.

[lxxvii] Ibid., 235.

[lxxviii] *Популярные Лекции по Атеизму*, p. 37.

[lxxix] For Engels's classification, see: Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Foreign Languages Press, Paris, 2020; for a (contested) critique of the claim of science's absolute monopoly as a system of knowledge, see, for example: Paul Feyerabend, *The Tyranny of Science*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2011.

[lxxx] For discussions on how atheism (or atheisms) may be defined, see: Stephen Bullivant, "Defining Atheism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, edited by Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 11–21.

[lxxxi] *Философский Словарь,* red. M.M. Розенталь П.Ф. Юдин, Издательство Политической Литературы, Moscow, 1963, p.34.

[lxxxii] *Марксистско-Ленинская Философия*: Исторический Материализм, red. A. Д. Макаров et al., Мысль, Moscow, 1973, p. 370.

[lxxxiii] Mikayıl Məmmədov; Maqsud Cəlilov, *Ateizm Tərbiyəsinin Əsasları*, Azərbaycan Dövlət Nəşriyyatı, Baku,

1989, p. 9.

[lxxxiv] *Elmi Ateizm*, red. A.F. Okulov, Maarif Nəşriyyatı, Baku, 1981, p. 9.

[lxxxv] Victoria Smolkin, pp. 84-86.

[lxxxvi] *Elmi Ateizm*, p. 224; *Популярные Лекции по Атеизму*,pp. 91-96.

[lxxxvii] Victoria Smolkin, p. 94.

[lxxxviii] Jan Tesař, p. 79; Victoria Smolkin, pp. 97–100.

[lxxxix] Victoria Smolkin, p.109.

[xc] *Elmi Ateizm*, p. 202.

[xci] *Популярные Лекции по Атеизму*, pp. 354-355.

[xcii] *Elmi Ateizm*, p. 248.

[xciii] *Популярные Лекции по Атеизму*, p. 356.

[xciv] Dimitry Pospielovsky, vol. 1, pp. 91–92.

[xcv] Victoria Smolkin, p. 169.

[xcvi] Ibid., 172.

[xcvii] Ibid., 187.

[xcviii] Ibid., 152.

[xcix] Dimitry Pospielovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, in 3 vols., vol. 3: *Soviet Studies on the Church and the Believer's Response to Atheism*, Macmillan Press, London, 1988, p. 182.

[c] Victoria Smolkin, p.154.

[ci] *Elmi Ateizm*, p. 273. Overall, 70–85 percent of all believers were women. Incidentally, the lower representation

of women among atheists is a global phenomenon. See: Melanie Elyse Brewster, “Atheism, Gender, and Sexuality,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, edited by Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 511–524.

[cii] M. Səttarov, *SSRİ-də Dini Qalıqların Qalmasının Səbəbləri Haqqında*, “Ateizm Məsələlərinə Dair Məqalələr” daxilində, Ateistin Kitabxanası, Baku, 1960, pp. 60-74.

[ciii] *Популярные Лекции по Атеизму*, pp. 376-377.

[civ] For example, although Peter L. Berger was one of the main proponents of the thesis of inevitable secularization in the 1960s (see: *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Open Road, New York, [1966] 2011), he abandoned this position after the 1990s.

[cv] See: *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, edited by Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, Part VI, especially Chapters 37 and 38.

[cvi] See: Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011.

[cvii] Victoria Smolkin, p. 143; in a 1988 study conducted by the CPSU Propaganda Department, 41,4 percent of respondents stated that atheist propaganda was harmful, and 34,3 percent considered it useless. Ibid., p. 235.