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THE INFLUENCE OF ATHEIST PROPAGANDA OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN UKRAINE ON THE LIVES OF BELIEVERS AND THEIR CHILDREN (1946-1991)

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the antireligious policy of the Soviet government, which was carried out by the communist regime in Ukraine in the cultural and educational spheres to completely eradicate religion from the lives of the Soviet people. The main purpose of atheistic propaganda was to convince ordinary people that religion and its bearers were enemies of the communist state. Atheistic propaganda was carried out in the form of lectures on natural science and atheistic topics, atheistic evenings of questions and answers, and demonstrations of scientific and feature films. Punitive and repressive methods of atheistic propaganda were used to punish opposition believers who failed to cooperate with the authorities. Special officers of the State Security Committee, Komsomol, and party activists, researchers, teachers, artistic, and creative intelligentsia took part in the atheistic propaganda. Although the Khrushchev campaign continued to spend a lot of money on films to promote atheism, most of them were not very successful, so the communist regime failed to end religion in a short time, especially at the domestic level.

The communist regime organized educational work among pupils and students in the spirit of militant materialism in schools, secondary schools, special educational institutions, and higher education institutions. Atheistic propaganda for children and youth was carried out systematically in the form of popular lectures on natural sciences, atheistic topics, demonstrations of scientific films, and through group and individual conversations. In order to prevent the penetration of religious ideology in the minds of children and to influence their feelings, one of the means of this influence was scientific, popular science articles, and works of art directed against religion and its

adherents. Children and young people brought up in the spirit of militant materialism were involved together with teachers, lecturers, Communist Party, and Komsomol, pioneering activists in the re-education of children from religious families. It was children whose parents belonged to opposition religious communities or were serving sentences for religious beliefs who found it most difficult to socialize without renunciation of their parents and religion.

Keywords: atheism, propaganda, totalitarian system, Soviet Ukraine, Evangelical Baptists, punitive and repressive methods, antireligious measures, upbringing, education, science, culture, children, believers.

Introduction

Ideological propaganda, as one of the effective mechanisms of influencing the consciousness of citizens, has always been effectively used by totalitarian and autocratic regimes to achieve their goals. One of the directions of ideological propaganda of the communist regime in the period of J. Stalin and his successors was scientific atheism and its propaganda. According to O. Panch, “some essential elements allow us to interpret scientific atheism as a phenomenon that is very close to ideology. Like any ideology, it was a kind of “matrix of collective consciousness” and “a schematic image of the social order.” There was no place for religion in this social order. Like ideology, scientific atheism mobilized and cemented Soviet society around common orientations and symbols of the struggle against religion as a “form of social consciousness” and organized human activity. He tried to answer the contradictions of Soviet public life, in which religion should not have been, but it still remained. On the other hand, he also had to help religion to “die” by using the most flexible methods of persuasion and enlightenment.”¹

S. Kulchytsky emphasizes, that ideology in a totalitarian society was imposed by means of state propaganda, education, literature, and art. Unwanted information was blocked with the help of censorship and law enforcement agencies, the secret police, educational institutions, public organizations, and creative unions. A great goal for the future (creation of a new society, a new order) and the use of any measures, including repressive measures, to achieve it was proclaimed. State control over the life of society was established starting from the family and centralized planning of production and distribution of material goods. Maintaining public perceptions of

¹О. Панч, *Науковий атеїзм як культурна система*. Українське релігієзнавство (2015, № 76), р. 23. [*Scientific atheism as a cultural system*. Ukrainian Religious Studies]. <http://nbuv.gov.ua/>.

external danger and the need to confront it by building defense capabilities was emphasized, creating the illusion of complete agreement of the population with the activities of leaders.²

Modern scholars, both secular and confessional, believe that the propaganda of “scientific atheism” in the days of Soviet totalitarianism was aggressive, discrediting Christian values and morals, and thus the church. Most researchers are convinced that J. Stalin, with the help of the so-called religious policy in the postwar period that was carried out within the framework of ideological propaganda, managed to realize his ambitious plans—in particular to raise his prestige in the international arena through the pro-government All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians Baptists religious communities and imprison leading presbyters.³

The Purpose and Means of Propaganda of Atheism and Its Impact on the Believers

J. Stalin understood that this situation--which developed in the post World War period in the UkrSSR destruction, excessive grain requisitions, human-made famine, and an unstable international situation--would allow him to apply new technologies and methods of manipulation to exercise absolute control over all social and spiritual life. So, he continued to attach an important role to ideological propaganda. After all, these technologies are able to provide guaranteed mass support of the country's leadership, especially if it is headed by a charismatic leader.⁴

In addition, propaganda could solve many problems that could not be solved and eradicated by terror and famine, including addressing the feelings of citizens, instilling myths, cults, and educating the population to worship their leaders, surrounded by a halo of omnipotence and infallibility to convince citizens that the goal set before society is best suited to the interests of

²С. В. Кульчицький, *Тоталітаризм* (Енциклопедія історії України : у 10 т. редкол.: В. А. Смолій (голова) та ін. ; Інститут історії України НАН України. Київ : Наук. думка, 2013, Т. 10, Т–Я), р. 131. 784 pp. [*Totalitarianism* (Encyclopedia of the History of Ukraine: in 10 volumes, editor: V. A. Smolii (chairman), etc.; Institute of History of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine)]. <http://www.history.org.ua/>.

³С. Савинский, *История русско-украинского баптизма* (Одесса: ОБС “Богомыслие”, 1995), [*History of Russian-Ukrainian Baptism* (Odessa: OBS “Bogomyслиe”, 1995)]; Ж. Юого. *История Евангельских христиан-баптистов Украины, России, Белоруссии (1917-1967 гг.)*, (Санкт-Петербург: Библия для всех, 2000), his same. [*History of Evangelical Baptists in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus* (1917–1967), (St. Petersburg: Bible for All, 2000)]; С. Санніков, Ю. Решетніков, *Огляд історії євангельсько-баптистського руху в Україні*, <http://old.baptyst.com/index.php>, [*Review of the History of the Evangelical Baptist Movement in Ukraine*]; О. Лахно, *Церковна опозиція Євангельських християн-баптистів в Україні (1940-1980 рр.)*, (Полтава: Друкарська майстерня, 2009), [*Church Opposition of Evangelical Baptists in Ukraine* (1940–1980), (Poltava: Printing Workshop, 2009)].

⁴С. В. Кульчицький, *Тоталітаризм* [*Totalitarianism*], р. 131.

each person, and that those who are in power are the best exponents of the aspirations and hopes of the people.⁵

The most important is the fact that the ideological propaganda of the totalitarian state made it possible to control the spiritual life of citizens, in general, and the individual in particular. During the war, many citizens of the USSR turned to God, and faith in God became spiritual support and hope for salvation. Therefore, losing the support and control over the spiritual life of a large number of citizens, the totalitarian government decided to use a number of ideological methods and mechanisms against religion, which were being spread obsessively in society.

Adhering to double standards in their treatment of Evangelical Christian Baptists religious communities, the totalitarian government, on the one hand, closed their houses of worship and seized church property, starved believers, and, on the other, tried to involve believers in propaganda. In particular, in the archives of the Central State Archives of Ukraine there is a letter from April 1946 of comrade Tverdostup, authorized agent in the Kirovograd region, to the authorized agent of Vilkhovy Rada, in which he asks for clarification on further sending a propaganda letter to believers with a patriotic call to join the spring sowing plan and fulfill the five year plan approved by the first session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.⁶

In response, a letter of instruction arrived from Moscow from the Chairman of the Council, I. Polyansky, to Vilkhovy, in Kyiv and in Kirovograd, to Tverdostup, in which an explanation was given. In the letter, Polyansky pointed out that it was not necessary to introduce into the system the distribution of special letters to senior presbyters, appeals to the faithful to take an active part in the fulfillment of the five-year plan, sowing and harvesting companies, etc. It is enough if some presbyters on “personal initiative” addressed in their sermons the faithful of their community with the need for high state and industrial discipline, using in this case the local example.⁷

This letter once again testifies to the treacherous behavior of the totalitarian government, that starved the inhabitants of villages and towns of the USSR, but recommended reliable local presbyters to direct believers to discipline, sowing and harvesting campaigns during prayer meetings. The letter also proves the fact that the totalitarian government, represented by the Chairman of the Rada and his local subordinates, followed clearly only the directives of the

⁵Ibid.

⁶*Центральный государственный архив высших органов власти Украины.* (1946). Ф. 4648. Оп. 2. Д. 12. Л. 19. [*Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine*].

⁷Ibid., p. 31.

totalitarian government, and nowhere in the documents mentioned were the believers of Kirovograd and Kyiv regions who were trapped in the grip of hunger.

As early as July 1946, according to the plans of the antireligious campaign, all authorized agents of the Council for Religious Cults were sent an order from the authorized agents of the Council P. Vilkhovy. The document consisted of orders to collect and provide by July 15, 1946, information about “relatives” in registered religious communities, including young people under and beyond the age of 25 who wanted to be baptized in water. The document also stated that it was necessary to provide general information about the cultural and educational institutions of the village where this religious community “deploys its work.” Finally, the authorized agents had to submit their opinions and proposals to eliminate these phenomena.⁸

This document shows that after 1946, a massive anti-religious campaign was launched to prevent especially young people from becoming members of religious communities. The execution of this order was entrusted to the local authorized agents, who were to organize various anti-religious events in cultural and educational institutions.

In 1947, the leader of the USSR ordered the renewed ideological discrediting of the church at a “higher level.” In particular, when Mihail Suslov became the secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) in 1947, Stalin advised him “not to forget about atheistic propaganda among the people,” adding, “among other things, that at present this is a question not the most important thing.”⁹

On July 7, 1947, on the initiative of M. Suslov, the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (“Knowledge”)¹⁰ was established in Moscow, one of the main tasks of which was the struggle against religion at a new, higher scientific level. The society expanded its branches in all union republics—in regions, territories, republics, cities, and districts. In addition, the primary organizations of the society were established at enterprises, collective farms, state farms, MTS (Machine and Tractor Station), scientific and educational institutions. The

⁸Центральный государственный архив высших органов власти Украины. (1946). Ф. 4648. Оп. 2. Д. 27. Л. 5. [Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine].

⁹С. Яремчук, *Православна Церква на Буковині в радянську добу (державно-церковні взаємини)*. (Чернівці: Рута, 2004), [The Orthodox Church in Bukovyna in the Soviet era (state-church relations. (Chernivtsi: Ruta, 2004), p. 86].

¹⁰Л. В. Ковпак, “ЗНАННЯ”, Товариство “Знання” України. Енциклопедія історії України: Т. 3, Е-Й, Редкол.: В. А. Смолій (голова) та ін. НАН України. Інститут історії України. (Київ: В-во “Наукова думка”, 2005), 672 с.: іл. [“KNOWLEDGE”, “Knowledge” Society of Ukraine. Encyclopedia of the History of Ukraine: Vol. 3, EY, Editor: V.A. Smoliy (chairman) and others. NAS of Ukraine. Institute of History of Ukraine. (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka Publishing House, 2005), 672 p. : ill.]. <http://www.history.org.ua/>.

society also published a monthly magazine, *The Militant Atheist*.¹¹ It was also given all the material resources of the Union of Militant Atheists, which ceased its activities for political reasons at the beginning of World War II and was officially closed in 1947. At the same time, the backbone of experts in scientific and atheistic propaganda under the new conditions were “those old cadres who were formerly called atheists.”¹²

In 1948, the All-Union Society “Knowledge” established its branches in the USSR. Authorities helped to reach as large a number of citizens involved in the society as possible; already “in 1950 it had 34 thousand members.”¹³

Under the name of leading Ukrainian scientists (academicians O. V. Paladin, V. P. Komissarenko, V. I. Zabolotny, M. M. Bogolyubov, etc.), university professors, teachers, famous figures of literature and art, engineers, and doctors, it launched a large-scale operation to promote scientific and medical knowledge through the organization of mass public lectures, scientific conferences, the creation of permanent and mobile lecture halls, and training highly qualified lecturers. At the same time, the educational work of the society was combined with the fanning of atheistic propaganda and the planting of ideological propaganda of the ruling elite.¹⁴

“All this, according to the just conviction of J. Kalakura, has led to a narrowing of the educational functions of the Society. In the pursuit of quantitative indicators, attention was weakened to the qualifications of lecturers and the quality of lectures, their methodological level, and there was an enchantment.”¹⁵

At the end of 1948, the leadership of the Soviet Union planned to intensify atheistic propaganda and conduct actions to weaken the authority of the church among the population. This action was accompanied by antichurch measures, including closing of churches due to the suspension of registration of religious communities.¹⁶ These measures were based on the order of the Council of Ministers of the USSR on October 28, 1948, according to which all registered

¹¹Союз воинствующих безбожников [Union of militant atheists]. <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

¹²Ibid.

¹³Я. Калакура, *Подвижники розумного, доброго, вічного* [про кн.: “Знання”: традиції і сучасність (1948-2003), [(Редкол.: В. Г. Кремень (голова) та ін.), (Київ: Український центр духовної культури, 2003. 308 с. Число 4 (9)), с. 435-436. [Ascetics of the intelligent, good, eternal [about the book: “Knowledge”: traditions and modernity (1948-2003), [(Editor: VG Kremen (chairman), etc.), (Kyiv: Ukrainian Center for Spiritual Culture, 2003. 308 pp. Number 4 (9)), pp. 435-436.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 435-436.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 436.

¹⁶С. Яремчук, *Православна Церква на Буковині* [The Orthodox Church in Bukovina], p. 87.

churches in which communities were not registered were then deregistered as inactive. They were strictly prohibited from conducting church services.¹⁷

The anti-religious resolution had a negative effect on the life of the religious communities of the Evangelical Christian Baptists of the Ukrainian SSR in general and the USSR in particular. After its promulgation, the 1929 Law about Religious Communities resumed, requiring all religious communities to register. In addition, the activities of communities were limited to meeting only the religious needs of believers within the houses of worship: missionary activity and religious propaganda were prohibited. The areas of activity of preachers and presbyters were limited to the place of residence of community members and the location of the house of prayer. It was forbidden to provide material assistance to its members, to create mutual aid funds, cooperatives, women's and youth meetings, biblical insights, and labor for the study of the Bible group.¹⁸

Therefore, such a policy caused that even in the houses of prayer, the faithful did not feel spiritual freedom. According to G. Vince, the restrictions even affected prayer. In worship during the common prayer believers were not allowed to ask God aloud for the brothers who suffered in prison.

Here is how the researcher describes it:

The meeting was chaired by the assistant presbyter Pavlo Hryhorovych Kovalyov. Suddenly he interrupted loudly the one who was praying from the pulpit. Everyone was very embarrassed. After the meeting, members of the church were asked to stay, and Kovalev announced: “Brothers and sisters, pray for prisoners at home, but here, in the house of prayer, it is impossible!” Someone objected: “But this is wrong, not according to the Gospel! Our brothers in the faith are in prison.” Then Pavlo Hryhorovych threatened: “We will be deregistered and the prayer house will be taken away.” Everyone was silent in confusion! A year later, Christian work among young people was banned in the church, including Bible reading, and preachers' trips to the villages almost stopped. But this did not save the Omsk community from closure: in 1949, the authorities confiscated a prayer house from the faithful and deregistered it, and in early 1950, Pavlo Hryhorovych Kovalyov was arrested and spent five years in handcuffs.¹⁹

Similar mechanisms were used by the totalitarian government against the Protestant communities of the USSR. Thus, under Stalin's new “religiously tolerant” policy, the church was

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 87-88.

¹⁸С. Савинский, *История русско-украинского баптизма* [*History of Russian-Ukrainian Baptism*], p. 104-105.

¹⁹Г. П. Винс, *Тропою верности*. (2 изд. перераб. и доп. Санкт-Петербург: Библия для всех, 1997), [*The Trail of Loyalty*. (2nd ed. Revised and supplemented St. Petersburg: Bible for all, 1997)], p. 173.

required to be registered for worship services, the missionary work of worshipers was forbidden, young people and children could not be involved in religious activities, and brothers in prison could not be prayed for. For violating these provisions, registration was taken away from the community as a minimum punishment, and their presbyters could receive the maximum term of imprisonment.

In general, Stalin's "religiously tolerant" policy was aimed at splitting the church from within by the presbyters themselves because, as it is well known, the terror and repression of the 1930s failed to eradicate people's faith in God. Therefore, this mission was entrusted to the elders, who hoped that if they followed the instructions of the leaders of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians Baptists, the latter would obey the orders of the Chairman of the Council on Religious Cults so the communities under their care would not lose registration or have any problems. In reality, everything was the other way around.

According to the plans of atheistic propaganda, in order to serve, some senior elders zealously tried to follow the instructions of the authorized agents and found any reason to close the houses of prayer. Thus, in the Central State Archives of Ukraine there are notes from the senior presbyter in the Volyn region, Agripinin, to the regional authorized agent Prokopenko, in which he, applying the standards during 1947-1948, proposed to optimize and deregister hundreds of religious communities in rural areas. In his final reports, he pointed out the same reasons for closing prayer houses, including their non-compliance with sanitary and fire regulations, noisy prayer meetings, elders' prophecies, small communities (less than 20 members), and so on. On this occasion, the religious communities of the Volyn Oblast ECB in the villages of Karlivka, Horky, Karpylivka, Pidtsarevychi, Kostyukhnivka, Stary-Kremenets, Khreniv, Shklinne, Borochytsia, Kosiv, Zalazzya, Nichohivka, etc., were closed.²⁰

Therefore, dissatisfaction with the actions of the presbyters began in many local churches, and ordinary members of the church tried to express their views on their non-compliance with the basic tenets of the Evangelical Christians Baptists community. This led to their split within the community. The atmosphere of distrust in the presbyters as mediators between ordinary believers and All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians Baptists spread to a significant number of registered communities in the Ukrainian SSR. Instead, the totalitarian government, which pushed

²⁰Центральный государственный архив высших органов власти Украины. (1948 г.). Ф. 4648. Оп. 2. Д. 47. Л. 18-25. [*Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine*].

the believers to internal division by its actions and legislation, taking advantage of the situation, closed communities under any pretext.

Such tendencies spread throughout the territory of the Ukrainian SSR. This is confirmed by the regular report of the authorized agent in Kamyanyets-Podilsky region, dated June 8, 1948, which contains information on the pretext and by whose hands the totalitarian authorities deregistered the religious communities of the Evangelical Christians Baptists in other regions as well. For example, the senior presbyter of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians Baptists in the Kamianets-Podilskyi region was ordered to provide information to the authorized agent on the number of registered and unregistered Evangelical Christians Baptists communities and believers, as well as to find violations of the law on religious cults. In a report received by the authorized official, the senior presbyter reported that “in the village of Mysyurivka, Starosinyavsky district, he dissolved a religious community due to the fact that its presbyter I. K. Kanarchuk, continuing the work of his predecessor, turned the house of prayer into a house,” and there were discussions of various kinds of “Zionism” and “Pentecostals.”²¹

Law enforcement agencies and special services tried to act out various situations for the division of believers, persecuted them with communal and sanitary services, local authorities, firefighters, tax inspection, senior presbyters All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians Baptists and, finally, ordinary residents of villages and towns of the USSR. These mechanisms were used in the context of mass antireligious propaganda, which was carried out in schools, higher education institutions, in the workplaces, and in the print media.

To protect themselves from the arbitrariness of local authorities and to restore registration, believers and their elders resorted to various measures, even writing to J. Stalin himself believing that he did not know about this situation; and, upon learning about their wanderings, they thought he would restore neglected justice and law to freedom of religion, which was declared by the Communists at the legislative level.

Instead, as it is recorded in G. Vince's memoirs:

Brother Kovalev went to Moscow in 1950 with a request to the government to return the registration taken away from the Omsk community, and I have now decided to clarify: – Pavel Grigorovich, is it true that you wrote a personal letter to Stalin on the return of registration and went with this letter to Moscow? Yes, there was such a thing, there was such a sin,” he replied, smiling awkwardly. – When the house of prayer was taken away from us in 1949 and the community was deprived of registration, we wrote several letters

²¹Ibid., p. 105.

to the government asking to return the registration, but there was no answer. Then several of our brothers decided to send someone to Moscow with a letter personally to Stalin. They chose me. This was in the early 1950s. When I arrived in Moscow, I first went to the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians office and told the brothers Zhidkov and Karev about our Omsk church. I asked them to help renew registration and return the house of prayer, but they just waved and said, “There is nothing we can do to help. Churches are now being closed across the country. And no one in Moscow will help you, the issue of registration is decided by the local authorities, not Moscow!” Someone in Moscow advised me to send a personal letter to Stalin, but not to seal the envelope, but to sew it with white threads. I was told, no one but Stalin himself would dare to open such a letter, he himself reads such letters and, perhaps, there will be a positive response. So, I did. I put our letter in an envelope, sewed it with white thread and dropped it in the mailbox at the main post office in the center of Moscow. Then he got on the train and went quietly home to Omsk. Three days later, State Security Committee officers were waiting for me at the train station in Omsk: they got into the car, presented me with an arrest warrant and took me to prison. I was given five years then. That's what it means to sew a letter to Stalin with white threads, it looks like it had to be sewn with red!” – brother Kovalev smiled.²²

These memories are a real testament to the treacherous ideological propaganda of the totalitarian regime which used a number of hidden mechanisms that discredited religious communities and believers in the eyes of Soviet citizens, and at the same time, created a positive image of Stalin as the leader of the peoples.

Thus, in order to exercise absolute control over all social and spiritual life and production, Stalin ordered the use of a number of effective technologies and methods of manipulating society. His “religious” policy, which he initiated during World War II in international politics, was conducted from the standpoint of ideological propaganda in the interests of the totalitarian regime by proclaiming freedom of conscience and religion through helping the believers to obtain official registration. However, official registration helped the totalitarian government to find the number and quality of registered Protestant communities, and then discredit them in the eyes of citizens and eliminate them with the help of the faithful themselves—senior presbyters and local authorities, Komsomol activists, and atheist propagandists. Atheistic propaganda was one of the effective mechanisms of totalitarianism that played an important role in discrediting religious communities and believers, the allegedly just imprisonment of leading presbyters, and the closure and destruction of thousands of Evangelical Christians - Baptists religious communities in the USSR. Atheistic propaganda, although carried out en masse, was primarily aimed at children and young

²²Г. П. Винс, *Тропюю верности* [*The Trail of Loyalty*], p. 175.

people in order to distract them from religion and to build a new communist society. Although, the means used for such a “great goal” were extremely aggressive and destructive.

Further, notes the Russian scientist Yu. Zuev, “scientific atheism had three interrelated dimensions: political, scientific, and practical. The political dimension consisted of resolutions of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and decisions of local party bodies in the field of atheistic work, which directed the activities of the centers of scientific atheism and formulated the goals of atheistic propaganda. Resolutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU were critically important to scientific atheism. They formulated guidelines, set goals, guided and defined strategies for the practical implementation of religious studies.”²³

During the period of collective rule on July 7, 1954, the Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU, “On the great shortcomings in scientific and atheistic propaganda and measures to improve it,” was issued. It stated that due to the revival of the “church and various religious sects” and the growing number of citizens who perform religious rites, the Party, Komsomol organizations, the Ministry of Education and trade unions “should conduct antireligious work systematically, with all perseverance, persuasion, patient explanation and individual approach to believers.”²⁴ On November 10, 1954, a new resolution “On Mistakes in Conducting Scientific and Atheistic Propaganda Among the Population” was passed, which condemned the use of slander, insult, and administrative interference in the activities of religious organizations.²⁵

The implementation of these ordinances in the provinces led to voluntarism on the part of anti-religious agitators who degraded the religious feelings of the faithful. Defending themselves against the arbitrariness of local authorities and activists, believers wrote letters to the authorized agents on matters of worship. For example, N. Kosenko, a presbyter in the Smila community of the Evangelical Christians - Baptists, wrote that in lectures, propagandists say, not to attend Evangelical Baptist services because they have three special days when they turn off the lights and are engaging in prostitution during their services. Not only believers, but even non-believers said

²³Ю. П. Зуев, *Институт научного атеизма (1964-1991). Антология отечественного религиоведения* (Москва: Изд-во РАГС, 2009. Ч. 1.), с. 9-34. [*Institute of Scientific Atheism (1964–1991). Anthology of domestic religious studies* (Moscow: RAGS Publishing House, 2009. Part 1.), pp. 9–34].

²⁴*КПСС в резолюциях и решениях съездов, конференций и пленумов ЦК.* (Москва, 1971. Т. 6), с. 502-505. [*The CPSU in resolutions and decisions of congresses, conferences and plenums of the Central Committee.* (Moscow, 1971. Vol. 6), p. 502–505].

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 516-517.

that they would not go to such lectures. I also believe that, for my part, this is a harsh insult to the faithful who defended their homeland with weapons in their hands and are still honestly fulfilling their civic duty. In the communities, including the Evangelical Christians - Baptists, the above-mentioned manifestations have never occurred.²⁶

In the cities and villages of the Ukrainian SSR, after this resolution, believers began to be fired en masse. Thus, the head of the committee of the construction department of the trust “Stalinugol” a believer and member of the religious community of Evangelical Christians - Baptists, Valentina Ivanovna Chernykh, and who also worked as a head of tailoring and sewing, was fired due to distrust as a member of a religious Baptist group in Stalino.²⁷

The beginning of Khrushchev's fierce antireligious campaign can be considered the release of a secret resolution of the CPSU Central Committee of October 4, 1958, “On the note of the propaganda and agitation department of the CPSU Central Committee in the union republics” and “On the shortcomings of scientific and atheistic propaganda.” These resolutions ordered the party, Komsomol, and non-governmental organizations to launch a propaganda attack on “religious remnants.”²⁸

This resolution was followed by a “cavalry offensive” by atheist propagandists against religious organizations on all fronts. Prophylactic activities of atheist propagandists against believers were carried out mainly through the press, radio, television, cinema. The Party, Komsomol, and trade union organizations were involved in atheistic re-education at the place of work or training the object of prevention.²⁹ In order to prevent and dismantle religious communities in villages and cities of Ukraine under the control of the State Security Committee special services, special meetings of workers, evenings of atheists, evenings of questions and answers, etc., were specially devoted to the activities of certain religious groups and specific participants.³⁰

²⁶Центральный государственный архив высших органов власти Украины. (1954 г.). Ф. 4648. Оп. 2. Д. 182. Л. 73. [Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine].

²⁷Центральный государственный архив высших органов власти Украины. (1955 г.). Ф. 4648. Оп. 2. Д. 195. Л.10. [Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine].

²⁸КПСС в резолюциях и решениях съездов [The CPSU in resolutions and decisions of congresses], p. 517.

²⁹Отраслевой государственный архив Службы безопасности Украины. (1957-1958 гг.). Ф. 2.4 – Управление МГБ УССР Отдел “О”. Д. 1093. Оп. 26. Л. 198. [Branch state archive of the Security Service of Ukraine. (1957–1958). F. 2.4 – Management of the MSS of the USSR Department “O”].

³⁰ Ibid., p. 202.

In a short time, by order of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, scientific and atheistic work was enacted throughout the USSR, in Kyiv and the region. (In particular, in Tetiiv, Brovary, Boguslav, Fastiv, Vasylkiv, Makariv, Zguriv districts. And also in the districts of Kyiv-Pechersk, Stalin, Podolsk, Shevchenko, Lenin, Railway, Moscow, Vladimir, etc.) Thus, in Rzhyschiv district on January 1 and October 20, 1959, the following scientific and atheistic events were held among the population: 152 lectures were given on the following topics: “What is the harmfulness of religious holidays,” “Vatican in the service of international reaction,” “Science and religion about the origin of the Earth,” and others. There were eight thematic evenings, including six answers and questions. The district newspaper often published articles on the origins of religion and on the desertion of clergy and citizens from religion. In particular, P. Demydivshchyna, where there were believers, Evangelical Christians, Baptists, and Pentecostals, systematically organized lectures, talks, held interesting evenings for two to three months and, as a result, Mikhail Stepanovich Tabachny, born in 1940, broke ties with religion. He said: “What kind of faith is it, if it forbids singing, going to school, going to the movies, dancing, and so on.”³¹

A similar comprehensive scientific and atheistic propaganda was carried out in Makariv district. According to the report, thematic evenings of atheism were regularly held in the district palace of culture and village clubs. After the lecture, films were shown, such as “Dark People” and others. Each dinner was attended by up to 350 workers, including believers. Permanent exhibitions of literature on scientific and atheistic topics were organized in all village clubs and district libraries, which were systematically updated and supplemented with new atheistic literature. The district newspaper “Leninska Zorya” systematically published materials on the issues of scientific atheistic propaganda on its pages.³²

The regime expected from the “dark masses of the sectarians” a public renunciation of religion with further cooperation with the state security agencies, which were to be used in the promotion of Soviet values, including scientific atheism. According to the Deputy Chairman of the State Security Committee under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Colonel B. Shulzhenko (January 4, 1961), 689 meetings of labor collectives and evenings of atheists were held during the year under the leadership and with the participation of Party and Soviet bodies; organized speeches

³¹Центральный государственный архив высших органов власти Украины. (1959 г.). Ф. 4648. Оп. 2. Д. 279. Л. 3. [*Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine*].

³²Ibid., pp. 3-14.

in the press with the advice of former “sectarians and clergy” on the materials of the State Security Committee; and articles of scientific and atheistic content, feuilletons, essays, brochures and books were published in the press, which debunked the anti-national activities of “churchmen and sectarians.” Articles were published on the activities of ideologists and organizers of “sects,” including Baptists, etc., as well as published collections of articles by former “sectarians” such as “We believed in God,” “We were Baptists,” and a number of others; and a film essay debunking anti-social activities and sadistic forms of Pentecostal prayer.³³

B. Shulzhenko also noted, that 64 open trials were organized during the year, some open trials were filmed and shown on local television and cinemas, and open trial materials were used during lectures and reports that were distributed among the population.³⁴ In total, according to him, members of operations groups of the State Security Committee of the republic read about 300 lectures and reports on atheistic topics to the population during the year. During preventive measures, under the influence of the public and as a result of individual work with “church and sectarians,” 3,755 organized churches and “sectarians” stopped organized illegal activities. About 1,200 people lost contact with religion, and about 700 of them published articles in the media.³⁵

According to the researcher O. Tevikova,

atheistic magazines *Science and Religion*, *Man and the World* were starting to be published. These magazines had to be subscribed to by all libraries as well as cultural and educational staff. Libraries arranged conversations, public readings, conferences, literary evenings, book exhibitions of an atheistic nature, and the production of appropriate propaganda visual aids was established. Censors sometimes required librarians to record conversations they had with readers, to record how books contributed to the growth of the ideological and political level and the formation of a materialist worldview, to promote anti-religious literature, and to persuade readers. Each year, the libraries reported on the amount of literature published on scientific, natural, and atheistic topics, which also testified to the Party's total control over the minds of the people and the obedient fulfillment of the tasks set by the cultural institutions.³⁶

After the closing of the antireligious newspaper *Bezbozhnyk* (Godless) in July 1941, its role in Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, and until the first half of the 1980s, was taken over by

³³Галузевий державний архів Служби безпеки України. (1959-1961 гг.). Ф. 1.3 відділ УДБ НКВС УРСР – 2 управління НКДБ КДБ УРСР. Спр. 1424. Оп. 1. Арк. 144. [*Sectoral state archive of the Security Service of Ukraine*].

³⁴Ibid., p. 145.

³⁵Ibid., p. 146.

³⁶О. Тевікова, *Антирелігійна пропаганда у закладах культури УРСР у 1953-1964 роках (на прикладі Полтавської області)*, [*Anti-religious propaganda in cultural institutions of the USSR in 1953-1964 (on the example of Poltava region)*]. <http://www.cerkva.pl.ua/>.

district, city, regional, regional, republican, All-Union newspapers, and so on. They had a special column to cover the problems of atheism. The task of the journalists who conducted these columns was to find topical antireligious material without worrying about the moral and ethical side of this problem. Even the humorous magazine *Pepper* was imbued with anti-religious satire, and God began to be portrayed as a comic character.³⁷

Soviet writers, filmmakers, and journalists also received a social order from the communist regime to publish anti-religious works. During this period, the novels *Miraculous* and *Extraordinary* by V. F. Tendryakov, *Sinner* by N. S. Yevdokimov, *Clouds over Borsk* by S. L. Lungin and I. I. Nusinov, *Save our souls* by S. L. Lviv, and others appeared.³⁸

Many of them were made into films. For example, the release of the film “Clouds over Borsky” became a notable event of that time. As the Russian researcher T. Nikolskaya notes, “Clouds over Borsk” can be called a “cult” antireligious picture. However, among film critics, it caused a mixed reaction immediately after the premiere. Thus, in 1961, the magazine *Soviet Screen* published a review by critic N. Klado: “Of course, sectarians can kill. But this is an extreme. And their pity is that they deprive a person of all the joys of life—work, creativity, culture. And here, it seems to me, the authors of the film ‘Clouds over Borsk’ made a mistake, showing that the joys—really the sectarians, and the troubles—in the ‘secular world.’”³⁹

Russian film critic O. Fedorov emphasized that “the films of L. Lukov and A. Feinzimmer largely correlated with the requirements of the relevant resolutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU (July 7, 1954, ‘On major shortcomings in scientific and atheistic propaganda and measures to improve it’ and of November 10, 1954, ‘On mistakes in conducting scientific and atheistic propaganda among the population’). A dozen anti-religious films were conceived and released (1959-1963) during Khrushchev's “thaw.”⁴⁰

According to O. Fedorov, with the coming to power of Khrushchev, which took place after 1956, the situation with the relations between the church and the state became more tense. On October 4, 1958, the resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU “On the lack of scientific

³⁷*Перець* (1958. № 22), [*Pepper* (1958. № 22)]. <https://www.studmed.ru/>.

³⁸T. К. Никольская, *Русский протестантизм и государственная власть в 1905-1991 годах* (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге, 2009. (Территории истории; Вып. 2), с. 174. [*Russian Protestantism and State Power in 1905-1991* (St. Petersburg: European University Press in St. Petersburg, 2009. (Territories of History; Issue 2), p. 174].

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁴⁰А. Федоров, *Анализ советских антирелигиозных фильмов* [*Analysis of Soviet anti-religious films*]. <https://psyfactor.org/kinoprop/antireligion.htm>.

and atheistic propaganda” was adopted. And immediately there was a state order to create a series of anti-religious media texts—in the press, in cinema, on radio and television. To some extent, the instruction to “launch an attack on religious remnants” was connected with the antistalinist restoration of the so-called “Leninist norms” (and Lenin's fierce atheism was well known to all), but it seems that the Soviet anti-religious struggle was largely needed by authorities as a tool to suppress dissent felt due to the impact of the “thaw” of the masses.⁴¹

Mass reproduction of atheistic literature, brochures, articles that “debunked certain religious movements,” including films, which were popular among the inhabitants of the USSR, and a number of atheistic documentaries did not bring the desired results. Although a lot of money was spent during the “Khrushchev campaign” on the production of films to promote atheism, most of them were not very successful.

In the early 1960s, illegal Baptist religious organizations grew as the faithful did not want to put up with anti-religious regulations published on behalf of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians - Baptists. According to the State Security Committee, this was a consequence of the low quality of atheistic literature, which covers the material superficially, without knowing the specific reality.⁴² State Security Committee analysts criticized the atheistic work of the Odessa Book Publishing House, which published 65,000 copies of Y. I. Usychenko's novel *The Black Cross*.

The book does not convey the real state of affairs that take place in the country's religious organizations in modern conditions. The author of the story showed ignorance of the Soviet legislation on religious cults, ideas about dogmas and rites of the main religious currents... The book is of no educational significance, the local press still speaks badly of the charlatanry and adaptation of all religious authorities to modern conditions, and raises society's awareness poorly regarding the fight against the most sadistic “sects” that maim spiritually the Soviet people,

the State Security Committee report said.⁴³

Intelligence officers criticized the atheistic work of local authorities. According to them, they controlled the activities of religious organizations poorly, did not analyze the processes among “churchmen and sectarians,” and did not direct efforts to eliminate primarily “sadistic sects.” In their work they relied little on society, the intelligentsia, and the Soviet party activists.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Галузевий державний архів Служби безпеки України. (1962 г.). Ф. 1.3 відділ УДБ НКВС УРСР – 2 управління НКДБ КДБ УРСР. Спр. 1423. Оп. 1. Л. 34. [*Sectoral state archive of the Security Service of Ukraine*].

⁴³ Ibid., p. 38.

The facts show that in some districts of the republic, some representatives of local authorities did not take into account the real situation with regard to church people; they tried to close only legal communities and churches. At the same time, this work was carried out without prior preparation... Thus, in the city of Rivne, workers Andreyko and Raevska were fired from a reinforced concrete plant when the director learned that they were members of a “sect.”⁴⁴ According to members of operation groups, such actions degraded the feelings of believers, encouraged them to religious fanaticism, and often generated unhealthy, anti-Soviet sentiments and an increase in the number of illegal religious communities.⁴⁵

In order to correct the dilettantism in the field of propaganda of atheism of local authorities, Komsomol and trade union activists, State Security Committee officers often performed their functions, in particular, they were widely involved in preparing atheistic events at workers' meetings, held atheist evenings, including question-and-answer evenings. Personally they participated in the work on the closure of churches and monasteries and illegal religious communities.⁴⁶

Therefore, the deputy head of the 2nd State Security Committee department, Colonel Sekarev, ordered the regional committees, city committees, district committees of the Party to intensify work on the schedule of legal and especially illegal church communities and the separation of the majority of believers from religion. He mobilized the struggle against religion and the broad masses of Soviet people, including all Party-Soviet activists, rural intelligentsia and former believers who renounced religious activities and appointed trained agitators to each believing family to organize work among “churchmen and sectarians.”⁴⁷ It was also ordered to set up separate groups of researchers, teachers, and experienced propagandists from atheists on a voluntary basis at the city and district committees of the party, who were tasked with holding atheist evenings and methodically leading agitators assigned to believers.⁴⁸

Much work in the promotion of scientific atheism relied on the creative and artistic intelligentsia. The State Security Committee recommended involving creative teams of writers, scholars, and skilled journalists to write pamphlets and books to scientifically debunk the ideology

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 39.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁸Ibid.

of the major religious “sects” and show their hostile nature among the Soviet people; to instruct the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR to create feature films aimed at debunking the leaders of the “sects” of Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, and Baptists; and to increase the production of atheistic documentaries, showing them primarily in rural areas.⁴⁹

In order to put atheistic propaganda among the population at the highest level and relieve the State Security Committee of its responsibilities to hold atheistic lectures, the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1964 established the Knowledge Society, the Institute of Scientific Atheism (ISA). Subsequently, other educational, scientific and propaganda institutions were formed, such as branches of the ISA, the Department of Scientific Atheism, the system of lectures, and publications of literature. The scientific dimension was determined by the study of religion for the purpose of its “scientific critique,” the conduct of applied religious studies, and the substantiation of the philosophy of scientific atheism as a worldview paradigm. The practical dimension of scientific atheism was education and propaganda to spread antireligious views and atheistic education.⁵⁰

According to the Russian scientist Y. Zuev,

First, on its organizational and status position: it was created in accordance with the resolution of the CPSU Central Committee, in the structure of the party scientific institution—the Academy of Social Sciences under the CPSU Central Committee, its activities were supervised by the Ideological Department. Secondly, according to the functions assigned to it: the Institute was guided and coordinated by all scientific work in the field of atheism carried out by the institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences (although it was not part of the Academy), higher educational institutions, and institutions of the USSR Ministry of Culture. Its main publications were *Questions of Scientific Atheism*, published from 1966 to 1989, usually two issues a year, with a volume of 17 to 25 printed sheets, with an average circulation of 20 thousand copies. A total of 39 issues were published during this period.⁵¹

Y. Zuyev also noted researchers who dealt with the problems of “Christian sectarianism,” (in particular Filimonov, Lyalin, Ipatov, Malakhov), relied not only on official documents of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians - Baptists, the publication of the *Brotherly Herald*, but also on a broader and representative base of sources, like uncensored publications and

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰О. Панч, *Научовий атеїзм* [Scientific Atheism], p. 24.

⁵¹А. Федоров, *Анализ советских антирелигиозных фильмов* [*Institute of Scientific Atheism (1964–1991)*, (2009)]. <https://web.archive.org/>.

confidential conversations with pastors and ordinary believers. Therefore, they are more meaningful, more specific, and more reasoned.⁵²

In addition, he emphasizes:

It was in connection with the study of Protestant communities in the 1960s and 1970s that the concept of “religious extremism” came into circulation. But its content in those days was fundamentally different from today. Religious extremism meant the actions of believers that went beyond the limits allowed by Soviet law: children's and youth Bible study groups, missionary and charitable activities, underground printing and distribution of religious literature, etc. Such actions were subject to administrative and criminal prosecution. That is, the religious extremism of that period (to use this term), was the extremism of defense, the defense of the natural space of believers in their religious life. It did not result in acts of violence or terror on their part.⁵³

Thus, the establishment of the Institute of Atheism, though it helped to improve the quality of atheistic literature and propaganda pamphlets (which were previously mostly offensive and discriminatory), also used such concepts as “extremism,” and “religious fanatics” in scientific literature in which believers were perceived as perverts or buffoons.

With L. Brezhnev's coming to power, the social order for atheistic film productions decreased slightly. As a film critic, O. Fedorov rightly points out, “with the departure of Khrushchev from the political arena, the number of anti-religious films decreased significantly because the anti-religious campaign, like many other initiatives of the Khrushchev period, was classified by the Brezhnev's leadership as a manifestation of “voluntarism.”⁵⁴ According to the resolutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Soviet government was not going to radically change its antireligious policy. For example, in the adventure film “The Mysterious Monk” (1967), the clergy were portrayed as tools of the White Guards. In two adaptations of Ilf and E. Petrov's novel *12 Chairs*, staged in the 1970s, Orthodox priests were ridiculed as selfish ... And in 1974 a more serious antireligious action was made against the Orthodox Church: in the drama “I'm looking for my destiny” by A. Manasarova, an Orthodox priest and intellectual (E. Martsevich) renounced his faith in the Almighty under the influence of disputes with an atheist scientist (G. Zhzhenov)... Here one can clearly feel the echo with the drama “Everything Remains for People” (1963) by G. Nathanson, shot nine years earlier, where during the action the academician (N. Cherkasov) entered into a conceptual dispute with an Orthodox priest (O. Popov).

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴A. Федоров, *Анализ советских антирелигиозных фильмов* [*Analysis of Soviet anti-religious films*].

The last outbreak of anti-religious propaganda in the USSR was the drama about the cruel sectarian habits of “Hops” (1991) by V. Tregubovich.⁵⁵

As a result, O. Fedorov points out that the Soviet antireligious films made between the 1950s and 1980s, improved as much as possible to reflect directly the political decisions of the state leadership performed their assigned functions: accusing the church and believers of various sins and trying to inspire the audience’s atheistic views. It must be acknowledged, however, that the outstanding masters of the screen (as a whole) sought to distance themselves from anti-religious themes. The atheistic state’s order was carried out mainly by cinematographers of the second and third levels.⁵⁶

The periodical press during L. Brezhnev's rule prepared the society for a “correct view” of religion and religious organizations. The media influenced the mood of the population, educated in the spirit of the rejection of believers. With the help of the state press, the communist regime imposed political labels on believers, covered lawsuits against them from a position favorable to them, and disseminated false information about the lives and cult practices of individual communities. Insults, direct threats from the pages of the press forced believers to react to them.

One of the forms of resistance of the faithful against the incitement of “hysteria” against certain members of the Evangelical Christian Baptists church and their families in the press were letters of complaint to higher authorities. In particular, in a letter to L. Brezhnev, believers reported that in July 1976 a defamatory article entitled “One Field of Berries” and a subheading “About whom and what Markevich prays” was published in a local newspaper. According to the believers,

the essence of this article is that Markevich has the same berry field as G. P. Vince, who suffered a supposedly deserved punishment, and prays for Vince and the other prisoners. A year later, in July 1977, a 40-minute television program showed believers in an unattractive perspective, and me, allegedly living on the money of the faithful: receiving from them 400 rubles, plus 25-30 rubles, for children, which is somewhat around 700 rubles. The compiler of this program, Sklyarov, was soon imprisoned for extorting a bribe. Obviously, he measured others by himself. It is a pity that he was trusted to slander the faithful of our entire republic. Here are the events of recent months: On July 22, an article appeared in the local newspaper “Self-confident criminals,” where I was presented as a person who took an oath of allegiance to the Council of Churches, organized by Vince. As an anti-Soviet criminal, I spit on the laws of Soviet society and how I misappropriated church funds. According to this article, on August 7, a meeting was held at the workplace where I work, where the article was discussed. During the week, a clipping of this article was posted on the bulletin board, reading: “Attention, read.” Then came the announcement

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

of the meeting with the agenda: “Discussion of the article and the antisocial behavior of a member of our team Markevich.” An hour before the meeting, the party committee gathered, where people were summoned and prepared for the speech. At the meeting, the head of the personnel department made a 15-minute report on the life of our community, which does not allow to marry non-believers. I allegedly put the community in such a state that it can do nothing, then trained people spoke. Then they let me speak. I told him that in contrast to the false position of the article, there is a real state of affairs and quoted texts from the Holy Scriptures; voices were heard from the hall: “Let him speak.” The reviews, although did not all reach me, were sympathetic and pleased with my performance. However, the meeting decided to ask the executive committee to take the necessary measures to V. A. Markevich to stop his illegal activities.⁵⁷

Thus, both the Soviet press, books, and feature films made significant contributions to atheistic propaganda, targeting ordinary Soviet citizens to distance themselves from religion and have contempt for believers and their religious feelings.

Atheistic Propaganda in Educational Institutions of the USSR and Its Impact on the Children of Believers

The resolution of the

Central Committee of the CPSU of July 7, 1954, “On the great shortcomings in scientific and atheistic propaganda and measures to improve it” obliged the Ministry of Education of the Union Republics and the Ministry of Higher Education of the USSR to strengthen educational work among pupils and students in the spirit of militant materialism, organizing in schools, secondary special educational institutions and universities the systematic holding of popular lectures on natural sciences, atheistic topics, demonstrations of scientific films. Teaching subjects (history, literature, science, physics, chemistry, etc.) should be filled with atheistic content, and topics on scientific and atheistic issues should be added to the curriculum of dialectical and historical materialism.⁵⁸

A few months later, a new resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU (November 10, 1954) “On errors in conducting scientific and atheistic propaganda among the population” stated that the Central Committee of the CPSU emphasizes that conducting scientific atheistic propaganda requires the most careful selection of lecturers, speakers, authors of articles, and brochures on religious topics. Only scientifically qualified personnel should be involved in this work, such as school teachers, teachers of technical schools, universities, doctors, agricultural

⁵⁷Бюллетень № 70 Совета родственников узников христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва, 1979), с. 5-17. [Bulletin № 70 of the Council of Relatives of Baptist Prisoners in the USSR. (Moscow, 1979), p. 5-17].

⁵⁸Вопросы идеологической работы. Сборник важнейших решений КПСС. (Госполитиздат, 1961), с. 61-65. [Questions of ideological work. Collection of the most important decisions of the CPSU. (Gospolizdat, 1961), p. 61-65].

specialists, workers of various research institutions, figures of literature and art and others who were able to explain convincingly the anti-scientific nature of religion from the standpoint of materialist worldview.⁵⁹

Great importance in the atheistic work of the propagandist was given to education in the spirit of the materialist worldview of youth and children. Many methodical and textbook materials were prepared for teachers to help in scientific and atheistic education of students. As it was noted by the compilers of the textbook for teachers *Scientific and Atheistic Education of Students* (1966), published with the assistance of the Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR:

The feelings of children and adolescents are easier to influence than their consciousness. After all, this does not require deep knowledge or scientific evidence and statements. Due to the fact that the sensory sphere in a child develops earlier than the intellectual one, while working with religious beliefs, special attention should be paid to this. To prevent the penetration of religious ideology in the minds of children and to influence their feelings and consciousness. One of the means of this influence may be the use of scientific, popular science articles and works of art directed against religion. Of course, with the development of the child's intellect we must also affect its consciousness to form the basis of a dialectical and materialist worldview. This work should be done systematically. In the early school years, preference should be given to influencing the child's emotions in order to bring the child's antireligious ideas to consciousness. With the physical and intellectual development of students, the dose of scientific evidence and generalizations should be gradually increased.⁶⁰

The materials of the manual were selected to show “the ecclesiastical deception of religious dogmas, the greed and inhuman cruelty of the ministers of various cults.”⁶¹ In the works of art, religious figures were depicted “as servants of the exploiters, who helped to rob, deceive the workers, with the help of a cross and a fist, dealt with the best representatives of the masses.”⁶² The manual presented articles and works of art that instilled in children of primary and secondary school age contempt for believers. After all, in atheistic works they were depicted “as religious fanatics who mutilate people physically and spiritually, depriving children of a happy childhood, stealing from them the joy of life.”⁶³

⁵⁹КПСС в резолюциях и решениях съездов, конференций и пленумов (Ч. 4. Госполитиздат, 1960), с. 46-50. [*The CPSU in resolutions and decisions of congresses, conferences and plenums* (Part 4. Gospolitizdat, 1960), p. 46-50].

⁶⁰Науково-атеїстичне виховання учнів (Хрестоматія). Посібник для вчителів I-VIII класів. Упорядники К. П. Кіндрат, В. А. Якубовський (Київ: Видавництво “Радянська школа”, 1966), с. 8. [*Scientific and atheistic education of students (Reader). Handbook for teachers of I–VIII classes*. Compilers KP Kindrat, VA Yakubovsky (Kyiv: Soviet School Publishing House, 1966), p. 8].

⁶¹Ibid., p. 8.

⁶²Ibid., p. 8-9; 73-265.

⁶³Ibid., p. 9.

The compilers gave teachers methodical advice on showing students the moral and ethical aspect in atheistic literature. The manual stated that “by reading and commenting the material in this section, the teacher should instill in students an intolerance of religion, a sense of indignation at the heinous deeds of the ministers of cults. Experience shows that works of art of atheistic content contribute to the development of immunity against religious poison. After all, children will remember for the rest of their lives what struck their soul,”⁶⁴ the authors emphasized. In addition, comments were given to each story, which glorified the Soviet government and degraded the cultists.⁶⁵ Great atheistic and educational value was given in the process of learning the basics of atheism to casual conversations on the content of the read works. The authors believed that this would involve students in a controversy that would “completely shatter the evidence of clergy and believers about the existence of God.”⁶⁶ The manual hypocritically emphasized the parasitic way of life of churchmen and believers. In particular, a separate section was devoted to “Anti-Religious folk art,” which contains materials of stories, songs, fairy tales, proverbs on anti-religious topics. In these works, the authors of the textbook pointed out, “the people expose religious myths, debunk the greed, dirty parasitic life of the clergy.”⁶⁷ In general, the authors noted that “artistic anti-religious material can be used in lessons of history, geography, language, literature, extracurricular activities with students, including evenings and mornings on the following topics: “We have the opportunity to live without God,” “Faith, God, church, bells – all the old superstitions,” “Soviet satellites of the earth did not find God in heaven,” and others. Excerpts from poems, fairy tales, stories, and religious chants are mostly included in montages read after a conversation or report on religious topics.”⁶⁸

The State Security Committee also dealt with the problems of atheistic upbringing of children and youth, arguing that “special attention should be paid to the upbringing of children of believers in atheistic work. Separating them from the influence of parents, the decisive role in this matter should belong to the school, as well as Komsomol and pioneer organizations. The school must take into account all the children of “churchmen and sectarians” for individual educational

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 11; 271-296.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 11.

work with them in the learning process, as well as extracurricular activities to assign such students teachers, Komsomol members, and pioneers.”⁶⁹

In the midst of atheistic propaganda, the persecution of young believers and children intensified. According to D. Shapovalov, a senior presbyter in the Vinnytsia region, young people have begun to secede from the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians - Baptists communities, and many have been expelled from schools and fired.⁷⁰

In a memorandum of the Deputy Commissioner of the Soviet in the Ukrainian SSR M. Gladarevsky for 1971 “On some facts of the influence of religion on children and youth” it was stated:

religious influence on the younger generation in the family is carried out in three ways: through direct contacts of ministers of religion with children; by influencing parents and relatives; creation of a certain religious microenvironment; the pressure on religious public opinion, which affects both parents and children. In 1970, sociological surveys were conducted in rural schools in the Zakarpattia region. 274 students from the villages of Velyki Komyati of Vynohradivskiy, Velyki Luchky of Mukachevo and Yasynya of Rakhivskiy districts were interviewed. It was found that of the surveyed students: 2.2% go to church for prayer, 0.4% read the Bible, 10.2% parents talk about religion, 22.3% parents and relatives talk about religious morality, and 68.0% do not educate in the religious spirit.⁷¹

The commissioner's report states the facts of the influence of atheistic propaganda on students. In particular, Fedir Pavlovych Zaychuk, whose father is a believer, studied for eight years at the “school” No. 3 in Vinnytsia. During his studies at the school, the teaching staff failed to make this student an atheist. To prevent him from entering a vocational school, the school administration stated in his description that he came from a “sectarian” family and attended prayer meetings with his parents. A similar incident took place in a school in the village of Staryi Zhyvotiv, Ilyinets district, Vinnytsia region. In some schools of the Ukrainian SSR, in particular, in the Usatovsky school of the Bilyaiv district of the Odessa region, children of atheists were incited against the children of believers. The third grade of this school, in which the children of believers Tymoshenko and Mysuruk studied, took the first place in the school in 1968, but the

⁶⁹Галузевий державний архів Служби безпеки України. (1962 г.). Ф. 1.3 відділ УДБ НКВС УРСР – 2 управління НКДБ КДБ УРСР. Спр. 1423. Оп. 1. Л. 42. [*Sectoral state archive of the Security Service of Ukraine*].

⁷⁰Центральный государственный архив высших органов власти Украины. (1961 г.). Ф. 4648. Оп. 2. Д. 322. Л. 7. [*Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine*].

⁷¹Центральный государственный архив высших органов власти Украины. (1972 г.). Ф. 4648. Оп. 5. Д. 293. Л. 82. [*Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine*].

Pedagogical Council did not give this class the first place only because five children of believers studied there. The principal of the Odessa Evening School warned the believer Umnov that he had not finished 10th grade because he was a “sectarian.”⁷²

The self-published documents of the Evangelical Christian Baptists church of the 1960s and 1970s cite a large number of violations of children's rights in secondary schools. Typical for this period were cases of physical violence against children for unwillingness to be in the ranks of the children's organization “Pioneer.” So, in 1964 in the city of Zhytomyr in school No. 30 of the 5th grade, Volodya Dovbysh was beaten at the school gate by the duty officer of school because he came to school without a tie.⁷³

In addition, the responsibilities of the class teacher included providing the child from the believing family with a description, which must indicate his/her religious affiliation. In the description of the 4th grade student Nadya Khrapova, teacher Shovkovska indicates that she did not join the pioneers because she lived in a religious family, the girl herself attended meetings. She does not perform any civic duties.⁷⁴ This characteristic did not only violate international law, including the 1959 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the USSR, but also Soviet law, which prohibits the indication of the religious affiliation of a child or citizen. This fact testified to the fact that the children of believers in a totalitarian society were discriminated against.

It was especially difficult for the children of believers whose parents were imprisoned for their religious beliefs. Such families were usually large and suffered not only financially but also morally. They got the most problems at school. In one of the letters addressed to the leaders of the USSR, the mother of five children wrote:

I, Germanyuk Ulyana Serhiivna, live in Voroshilovgrad region, Lysychansk-6, street MUD, 22, mother of 5 children, the man is behind bars for confessing the Living God. From a very young age, I have been persecuted for wanting to serve the Lord. When I was at medical school, I was threatened with expulsion from school if I did not renounce my faith in God. Then I entered the institute, where at the end I repeated the same words—and I did not receive a diploma. But still, despite all the difficulties, a year later I had documents on graduation. And a new wave of persecution began at work, where I worked as a veterinarian. During this time, I was fired twice, even though I am a mother of many children. Then I changed my place of residence, but there I was found by “caring hands”

⁷²Ibid., p. 83.

⁷³Бюллетень № 32 Совета Родственников узников Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1976), с. 59. [Bulletin № 32 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1976), p. 59].

⁷⁴Бюллетень № 10 Совета Родственников узников Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1972), с. 49-50. [Bulletin № 10 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1972), pp. 49-50].

again. I managed to work at the new place for only one year. After all the above, I decided to forget my education and went to wash the porches, then worked as a stoker. Recently I worked as a guard, hoping that I would not be released from there, but a little time passed, I did not find a place there. I briefly reported this personally, and my husband Stepan Hrymanovych Germanyuk was repeatedly fined 50 rubles, placed in a bullpen for 15 days, and then sentenced to 4.5 years in prison camps and 3 of them in a settlement. Children at school are also ridiculed and underestimated. In these persecutions for faith in God, the Lord makes us selfless, fearless. Years of bullying confirm that we are being deprived of our basic right to exist. I ask you, dear children of God, to pray for us that we endure all sorrows and deprivations while remaining faithful to the Lord. 10 / IX-1974, Germanyuk U. S.⁷⁵

In the 1980s, the persecution of the children of believers in educational institutions did not stop. An eyewitness to those events, Valentyna Ivanivna Levchenko (b. 1967, Yahotyn, Kyiv Oblast), who grew up in a family of believers and visited an unregistered community in Yahotyn, Kyiv Oblast, spoke about the forced atheistic upbringing of children at high school. The witness of those events tells V. Levchenko that the process of her atheistic re-education at school took place in several stages:

At first I had an educational conversation about the religious affiliation of my parents with the head teacher of educational work. He mainly asked me if I would go to church in good faith or if I would not be physically influenced by my parents. Then the process of atheistic re-education was carried out by the class teacher. It is clear that the human factor played a special role here, because my class teacher was a member of the CPSU, so he was especially jealous of this task. Even before my class joined the pioneers, constant educational conversations began about the importance of this step in the life of a Soviet child. Of course, on the day of enrollment I was absent from school, just missed classes with my sister (my parents didn't even know anything about this case). After that, for the class teacher, my atheistic re-education became a matter of honor. In the presence of the class, she gave me a pioneer uniform and put on a red tie, which testified to belonging to this organization. She came to the first lesson every morning to make sure I was wearing a tie. This red handkerchief has become a kind of moral burden, because in my religious consciousness this thing was the personification of a certain pagan fetish. So on the way home, I took it off and put it in my briefcase, and in the morning I put on the crumpled tie again under the pressure of the class teacher. This irritated the teacher so much that once, calling me to the board, she smashed a large piece of chalk on my head. In addition to the physical and moral pressure from the teachers, students from all over the school, who knew very well that my parents were Baptists, also joined the reeducation process. After all, once I and my older sister Natalia and brother Benjamin were put in front of the whole school on the line, probably in order to return to the "right path." Of course, the whole school laughed at us. After this incident, we turned into "white crows," who just pointed and had fun. There were cases when children attacked me and my sisters with fists, convinced of

⁷⁵Бюллетень № 35 Совета Родственников узников Евангельских христиан-баптистов в СССР. (Москва. 1974), с. 56. [*Bulletin № 35 of the Council of Relatives of Evangelical Baptists in the USSR. (Moscow. 1974), p. 56.*]

their rightness. Some offered to help get rid of “religious webs.” A girl from my class told me: If your parents force you to go to church, we will put them down quickly! It was then, as a child, that I first felt what a humiliation of human dignity was.⁷⁶

The persecution of me and my sisters at school ceased completely before Ukraine declared its independence. Here is what my younger sister Oksana, who graduated from school in 1991, said: – “In the autumn of 1990, my class teacher O. I. Rudnytska asked who would join the Komsomol, but I did not raise one hand from the whole class. In response, I heard from a classmate, who said angrily so that everyone could hear: – Well, God, you do not go to the Komsomol? And in the spring of 1991, almost half of the students in my class refused to join the Komsomol...”⁷⁷

Only with the collapse of the USSR and the fall of the communist regime in Ukraine did the persecution of children and young people in educational institutions for their religious beliefs cease. At the same time, many of the children of opposition believers have not been able to survive years of re-education in an atheistic school without moral trauma. According to V. Levchenko, “her brother Benjamin, who as a boy received more insults, bullying, threats than girls, after years of moral and physical abuse at school by teachers and peers outside school, was unable to socialize. He has no family, no permanent job, he abuses alcohol. There are a lot of such bitter fates only from our environment...”⁷⁸

Conclusions

The aim of the anti-religious campaign of Soviet leaders was the complete eradication of religion from the life of the Soviet man/woman. The methods used by the communist regime to pursue an antireligious course were obsessive atheistic propaganda, and were used to convince ordinary people that religion and its bearers were enemies of the communist state. Atheistic propaganda was carried out in the form of lectures on natural science and atheistic topics, atheistic evenings of questions-answers, demonstrations of scientific and feature films. Punitive and repressive methods of atheistic propaganda were used to punish opposition believers who failed to cooperate with the authorities. State Security Committee special services, Komsomol party activists, researchers, teachers, and artistic and creative intellectuals took part in the atheistic propaganda. Although the Khrushchev campaign continued to spend a lot of money on films to

⁷⁶Записано 15 квітня 2014 р. від Левченко В. І. 1969 р.н., яка мешкає в м. Яготин Київської області. [Recorded on April 15, 2014 by Levchenko V.I., born in 1969, who lives in Yahotyn, Kyiv region].

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

promote atheism, most of them were not very successful, so the communist regime failed to put an end to religion in a short time, especially at the domestic level.

The communist regime organized educational work among students in the spirit of militant materialism in schools, secondary schools, special educational institutions, and higher education institutions. Atheistic propaganda for children and youth was carried out systematically in the form of popular lectures on natural sciences, atheistic topics, demonstrations of scientific films, group and individual conversations. In order to prevent the penetration of religious ideology in the minds of children and to influence their feelings, one of the means of this influence was scientific, popular science articles, and works of art directed against religion and its adherents. Children and young people, brought up in the spirit of militant materialism, were involved together with teachers, lecturers, party and Komsomol, pioneering activists in the re-education of children from religious families. Children whose parents belonged to opposition religious communities or were serving sentences for religious beliefs found it most difficult to socialize without renunciation of their parents or religion.

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