

Arto Luukkanen

THE RELIGIOUS POLICY OF THE
STALINIST STATE

Suomen Historiallinen Seura

Finnish Historical Society

Societas Historica Finlandiae

Studia Historica 57

Arto Luukkanen

The Religious Policy of the Stalinist State

**A Case Study: The Central Standing Commission
on Religious Questions, 1929-1938**

SHS / Helsinki / 1997

This study is published by the Finnish Historical Society and is funded by the Finnish Academy. It has been completed under the auspices of the research project, "Values, Norms and Transition in The Soviet Society" (directed by Dr. Timo Vihavainen, Renvall-Institute, University of Helsinki).

Cover and design: Rauno Endén

Picture: Dimitry Moor. Bezbozhnik No. 1. 1923.
Лучшие страницы советской
сатирической графики. Выпуск
I 1917–1941. Издательство "Советский
Художник". 1988. Москва.

Distributor: Tiedekirja, Kirkkokatu 14, 00170 Helsinki, Finland.
Tel: 358-09-635177, fax: 359-09-635017, email: enden@shs.pp.fi

ISSN 0081-6493
ISBN 951-710-068-X

Tammer-Paino Oy, Tampere 1997

i. Preface

This work has been completed with the financial assistance of the Finnish Academy. As a Junior Fellow, I have been able to concentrate full-time on research and archival work. For this opportunity I am deeply grateful! I also want to express my gratitude to the Emil Aaltonen Foundation, Ella and Georg Ehrnroot's Foundation, Oskar Öflunds Stiftelse, Finnish Cultural Foundation, and E.J. Sariola Foundation for their generous support.

The completion of this work is due to the help and encouragement of many. I am especially indebted to colleagues at the Department of Church History of the University of Helsinki. Professor Juha Seppo has been my learned advisor for this study. I also owe him my gratitude for reading my study in draft form.

More than anything, I wish to direct my profound gratitude and respect for "the place"; for Renvall-Institute and its Russian and East European Studies program at the University of Helsinki. Dr. Docent Eino Lyytinen, director of the Renvall-Institute deserves a special thanks for creating such an inspiring atmosphere at this institution. Dr. Docent Timo Vihavainen, the director of our project, has provided critical, stimulating, and challenging advice to the project team.

A special word of gratitude goes also to many colleagues such as Professor Gregory Freeze, Professor Robert Service, Professor Afton Rees, Professor Gabor Rittersporn, Professor Richard Stites, Professor Glennys Young, Dr. Edward Roslof, Dr. Daniel Peris, Dr. Jeremy Smith (to mention only few). I also owe my thanks to my Finnish and Russian friends and colleagues such as Prof. Juha Tolonen, Prof. Juha Sihvola, Dr. Docent Timo Piirainen, Dr. Docent Lars-Folke Landgrén, Dr. Docent Kimmo Kääriäinen, Dr. Esko Laine, Tuija Laine MA, licentiate Jelena Adel, Julija Azbel MA, Jari Nuutinen MA, Varpu Myllyniemi MA, Eila Rytkö MA, Timo Rosqvist MA, Rev. Pertti Huttunen, Marjatta Suikkanen MA, etc. All of them deserve my sincere thanks.

I also wish to express my thanks to Dr. Jyrki Iivonen of the Ministry of Defence, Valdemar Melanko, director of the Institute of Russian and East European Studies in Helsinki, Dr. Ilmari Susiluoto and Dr.

Thomas Parland of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, I would like to thank the personnel and staff of the Finnish Institute in London, especially the director of this institution, Dr. Henrik Stenius and his "deputy" Pirkko Hautaniemi MA. My appreciation also goes to helpful staff of various Russian archives; RTsKhIDNI, GARF, TsGA SPb. Last but not least, I have had the privilege to get acquainted with Paul Sjöblom MA, Micheal Briody MA, and Dr. William Copeland, who have been kind enough to read, comment and revise my text. However, I want to emphasize that all interpretations, opinions and errors in this monograph are naturally the sole responsibility of the author.

I am grateful that the Finnish Historical Society has agreed to publish this work. Without the help of Rauno Endén MA, secretary of the Finnish Historical Society, this manuscript might not have seen the daylight. Please accept my sincere gratitude!

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Finally, my wife, Dr. Tarja-Liisa Luukkanen deserves special recognition for bearing with me during the long process of researching and writing this book. She has been an invaluable friend and a reliable and beloved colleague during "this great trial". Her encouragement, love and support, has enabled me to overcome all difficulties.

This book is dedicated to my wife, Tarja-Liisa and to our two wonderful sons, Juho Elias and Aapo Matias.

Järvenpää, September 1997

Arto Luukkanen

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ii. Abbreviations, terms and list of tables

Admnadzor	Administrativnyi Nadzor (Administrative Supervision)
agitpunkt	Agitatsionnyi punkt (The Post of Agitation)
AGMIR	Arkhiv Gosudarstvennogo Muzeya Istorii Religii (State Museum of the History of Religion)
AK	Azbuka Kommunizma (ABC of Communism)
Antireligiozniki	Cadres and Activists of Soviet Antireligious Activity
APO	Agitatsionno-Propagandistskii Otdel (The Agitation and Propaganda Section, Agitprop)
apparatchik	A member of the machinery of the party
APRF	Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (The Archive of the President of the Russian Federation)
AR	Antireligioznik
ASSR	Avtonomnaya Sovetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic)
ASPT	Akty Svyateishego Patriarkha Tikhona (Statutes of His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon)
AT	Arkhiv Trotskogo (Trotsky Archive)
bednyak	poor peasant
BLOK	Byulleten Leningradskogo Oblastnogo Komiteta VKP(b) (The Bulletin of the Leningrad Oblast Committee VKP(b))
BO	Byulleten Oppozitsii
BP	Bolshevistskaya Pechat
BSE	Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia)
CAP	The Commission of Antireligious Propaganda
Cheka	Chrezvychainaya Komissiya (The Extraordinary Commission)

chistka	party purge
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
Comintern	Kommunisticheskii Internatsional (The Communist International)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCRQ	Central Standing Commission of Religious Questions
d.	delo (file)
dvadtsatki	groups of 20 believers
desyatina	1.09 hectares
DSV	Dekrety Sovetskoi Vlasti (The Decrees of Soviet Power)
ES	Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar (The Encyclopedic Dictionary)
f.	fond (collection)
GARF	Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (The State Archive of the Russian Federation)
Gensec	Generalnyi Sekretar (The General Secretary)
Glavotsstrakh	Glavnoe Sotsialnoe Strakhovanie (The Main Social Insurance)
Gorsoviet	Gorodskoi Sovet (The City Council)
Gorraiadminis- otdely	Gorodskie i Raionnye Administrativnye Otdely (Municipal and District Administrative Departments)
Gosstrakh	Gosudarstvennoe Strakhovanie (The State Insurance)
GPU	Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie (The State Political Administration)
Guberniya	Province, administrative unit
Gubkom	Gubernskii Komitet (The Provincial Committee)
Gulag	Glavnoe Upravlenie Ispravitelno-trudovykh lagerei (The Main Directorate of Corrective Labour Camps)
Isburo	Iсполnitelnoe Byuro (The Executive Bureau)
ISK	Istoriya Sovetskoi Konstitutsii (The History of the Soviet Constitution)
Ispolkom	Iсполnitelnyi Komitet (The Executive Committee)

Ispolkomdukh	Ispolnitelnyi Komitet po Delam Dukhovenstva (The Executive Committee for the Affairs of The Clergy)
Ist	Istochnik
IPRTs	Istoriya Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi (The History of The Russian Orthodox Church)
IzvTsK KPSS	Izvestiya Tsentralnogo Komiteta KPSS (The News of the Central Committee of the CPSU)
K	Konferentsiya RKP(b) (The Conference of the RCP(b))
KG	Krasnaya Gazeta
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (The Committee of State Security)
KI	Kommunisticheskii Internatsional (The Communist International)
KIM	Kommunisticheskii Internatsional Molodezhi (The Communist Youth International)
KIPVK	Kommunisticheskii Internatsional pered VII Vsemirnym Kongressom (The Communist International before the VII World Council)
KN	Krasnaya Niva
Kolhoznik	a collective peasant
Komsomol	Kommunisticheskii Soyuz Molodezhi (The Young Communist League)
KP	Komsomolskaya Pravda
KP(b)U	Kommunisticheskaya Partiya (Bolshevikov) Ukrainy The Communist Party of the Ukraine (Bolsheviks)
KPSS	Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza (The Communist Party of the Soviet Union)
krai	Administrative division
Kraispolkom	Kraevoi Ispolnitelnyi Komitet (The Executive Krai committee)
Kraikom	Kraevoi Komitet (The Committee of Administrative Division)
Kulak	rich peasant
Kultprosvetrabota	Kulturno-prosvetitel'naya rabota (The Section of Culture and Enlightenment Activity)
KZ	Krasnaya Zvezda
l, ll	list, listy (leaf, page, leaves, pages)

Lenoblispolkom	Leningradskii Oblastnoi Ispolnitelnyi Komitet (The Leningrad Province Executive Committee)
Lesohim	Lesohimicheskaya Promyshlennost (The Wood and Chemical Industry)
Lensovet	Leningradskii Sovet (The Leningrad Soviet)
LP	Leningradskaya Pravda
lishentsy	disenfranchized persons
Metallom	Metallicheskii Lom (The Scrap-Metal Corporation)
Mosoblispolkom	Moskovskii Oblastnoi Ispolnitelnyi Komitet (The Moscow Province Executive Committee)
Mospo	Moskovskii Oblastnoi Soyuz Potrebitelskikh Obshchestv (The Moscow Province Union of Consumers Association)
MTS	Mashino-Traktornaya Stantsiya (Machine-Tractor Station)
MVD	Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
Narkomnats	Narodnyi Komissariat po Delam Natsionalnoston (People's Commissariat of Nationalities)
Narkompros	Narodnyi Komissariat Prosveshcheniya (People's Commissariat of Enlightenment)
Natsrespublika	Natsionalnaya Respublika (The National Republic)
NEP	Novaya Ekonomicheskaya Politika (New Economic Policy)
NKF	Narkomfin, Narodnyi Komissariat Finansov (The Peoples Commissariat of Finances)
NKID	Narodnyi Komissariat po Inostrannym Delam (People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs)
NKPut	Narodnyi Komissariat Putei Soobshcheniya (Peoples Commissariat of Communications)
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs)
NKSobez	Narodnyi Komissariat Sotsialnogo Obespecheniya (Peoples Commissariat of Social Security)
NKVoenoi	Narodnyi Komissariat po Voennym Delam (Peoples Commissariat of Military Affairs)
NKTrud	Narodnyi Komissariat Truda (Peoples Commissariat of Labour)
NKYust	Narodnyi Komissariat Yustitsii (People's Commissariat of Justice)

NKZem	Narodnyi Komissariat Zemledeliya (People's Commissariat of Agriculture)
No.	Nomer (Number)
Nomenklatura	Members of Soviet bureaucracy appointed to specific posts by organs of the Russian Communist party
NK	Neizvestnaya Kareliya (The Unknown Karelia)
NR	Neizvestnaya Rossiya (The Unknown Russia)
Obkom	
(Oblastkom)	Oblastnoi Komitet (The Province Committee)
oblast	district, administrative unit
Oblprofsovet	Oblastnoi Professionalnyi Sovet (Province Professional Council)
OGPU	Obedinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie (The Unified State Political Administration)
okrug	administrative unit between region and district
OKS	O Konstitutsii Soyuza SSR (On The Constitution of the Union of SSR)
OMAR	Organizatsiya i Metodika Antireligioznoi Raboty (Organization and methodology of antireligious work)
op.	opis (inventory)
Orgkomsekt	Organizatsionnaya Komissiya po Sektanstvu (Organizational Commission for Sectarians)
ORTs	O Religii i Tserkvi (On Religion and Church)
PredVTsIK	Predsedatel VTsIK (The Chairman of the VTsIK)
Politburo	Political Bureau, TsKa
Politotdel	Political department
POVVS	Polozhenie o Vyborakh v Verkhovnyi Sovet (The Statute on Elections to The Supreme Council)
Pp	Politburo protocols
Proverka	verification of party cards
PS	Partiinnoe Stroitelstvo
PZM	Pod Znamenem Marksizma
pyatiletka	Five-year plan

	raion	district, administrative unit
	Raiadinnadzor	Raionnyi Administrativnyi Nadzor (The District Administrative Supervision)
	Raipartkonferentsiya	Raionnaya Partiinaya Konferentsiya (The District Party Conference)
	Raisovet	Raionnyi Sovet (The District Soviet)
	raskol	schism
	raskulachivanie	Confiscation of property and expulsion of rich peasants
	Rik	Raionnyi ispolnitelnyi komitet (The District Executive Committee)
	RK	Raionnyi Komitet (The District Committee)
	RKI, RabKrin	Raboche-Krestyanskaya Inspektsiya (The Inspection of Workers and Peasants)
14	RNSUV	Rossiiskii Natsionalnyi Soyuz Uchastnikov Voyny (The Russian National Union of Participants in The War)
	ROC	The Russian Orthodox Church
	Rosstakh	Rossiiskoe Strakhovanie (The Russian Insurance)
	RKP(b)	Rossiiskaya Kommunisticheskaya Partiya (Bolshevikov) (The Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks))
	RP	Russkoe Proshloe (The Russian Past)
	RPTs	Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov
	RPTsKG	Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov i Kommunisticheskoe Gosudarstvo (The Russian Orthodox Church and Communist State)
	RSFSR	Rossiiskaya Sovetskaya Federativnaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika (Russian Federative Soviet Socialist Republic)
	RSS	Rapports Secrets Soviétiques
	RTsKhIDNI	Rossiiskii Tsentr Khraneniya i Izucheniya Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii (The Russian Centre of Conservation & Study of Records for Modern History)
	Rudmetalltorg	Torgovlya Rudoi i Metallom (The Trade of Ore and Metal)
	S	Sezd Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Bolshevikov) (The Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks))

Samizdat	Samostoyatelnoe izdatelstvo (The independent, "underground" publications)
samotek	lack of leadership
SCE	The Section of Culture and Enlightenment
SG	Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo
Secretariat	Bureau of Secretaries, TsKa
serednyak	"middle" peasant
skhod	village assembly
smychka	The alleged "union" between Soviet peasantry and industrial workers
Sovkhoz	Sovmestnoe Khozyaistvo (The Collective Farm)
Sovnarkom	Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov (The Council of People's Commissars)
SPI	Spravochnik po Istorii Pravoslavnykh Monastyrei (The Reference Book On History of The Orthodox Monasteries)
SPO	Sekretno-Politicheskii Otdel (The Secret Political Department)
SPR	Sobranie Postanovlenii i Rasporyazhenii Pravitelstva SSSR (The Collection of Laws and Decrees of the Government of the USSR)
SPS	Sezd Professionalnykh Soyuzov (The Congress of Trade Unions)
SR	Sotsial-Revolyutsioner (Social-Revolutionary, SR party)
SS	Sochineniya I.V. Stalina (The Collected Works of I.V. Stalin)
SSR	Sezdy Sovetov RSFSR v Postanovleniyakh i Rezolyutsiyakh (Congresses of Soviets of RSFSR on decisions and resolutions)
SSS	Sezd Sovetov Soyuzo SSR (Congress of Soviets of Union of SSR)
stikhiinost	spontaneity
STO	Sovet Truda i Oborony (The Council of Labour and Defence)
SU	Sobranie Uzakonenii (The Collection of Legislation)
SUR	Sobranie Uzakonenii i Rasporyazhenii (The Collection of Legislation and Decrees)
SV	Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik
SVB	Soyuz Voinstvuyuschikh Bezbozhnikov (The League of the Militant Godless)
svodka	summary

SZR	Sobranie Zakonov i Rasporyazhenii (The Collection of Laws and Decrees)
Trudstrakh	Trudovoe Strakhovanie (The Labour Insurance)
TsGA SPb	Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga (The Central State Archive of the Sankt-Petersburg)
TsIK	Tsentralnyi Iсполnitelnyi Komitet (The Central Executive Committee)
TsKa	Tsentralnyi Komitet (The Central Committee)
TsKK	Tsentralnaya Kontrolnaya Komissiya (The Central Control Commission)
TTP	The Trotsky Papers
UK	Ugolovnyi Kodeks (The Criminal Law)
UKR	Ugolovnyi Kodeks of the RSFSR (The Criminal Law of the RSFSR)
uezd	administrative unit
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VA	Voinstvuyushchii Ateizm
VAN	Vestnik Akademii Nauk
veche	Popular Assembly in Medieval Russian Towns, the legendary bell of this assembly
VG	Vestnik Gallipoliitsev
VI	Voprosy Istorii
VKP(b)	Vsesoyuznaya Kommunisticheskaya Partiya (Bolshevikov) (The All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks))
VKR	Vestnik Krestyanskoi Rossii
VS	Volnoe Slovo (The Free Word)
VOG	Vestnik Obshchestva Gallipoliitsev
Vozhd	the great leader - nickname of Stalin, see Gensec
VsNKh	Vsesoyuznyi Sovet Narodnogo Khozyaistva (All-Union Council of Economy)
VSS	Vserossiiskii Sezd Sovetov (All Russian Congress of Soviets)
VTsIK	Vserossiiskii (Vsesoyuznyi) Tsentralnyi Iсполnitelnyi Komitet (All-Russian (All-Union) Central Executive Committee)
VTsSPS	Vsesoyuznyi Tsentralnyi Sovet Professionalnykh Soyuzov (All-Union Central Council of Professional Unions)

- ZOK Zakonodatelstvo o Religioznykh Kultakh (The
Legislation on the religious cults)
- Y Yaroslavsky, Em. (The Collected Works of E.I.
Yaroslavsky)

References to the individual opis and delo of each fond are included in the notes. In the transliteration of Russian names the system of the British Standards Institution (BSI) has been followed. Diacritical marks have been omitted and soft and hard signs have not been transliterated in names of places. The endings -ый/ий are rendered as -y in names of individual persons. For example, see Terence Wade, *A Comprehensive Russian Grammar*. Blackwell Publishers. Oxford. 1992.

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The names of the original documents have generally been referred to in the Cyrillic alphabet. If this has not been possible, the location of the original documents has been shown by indicating the pages of a particular file. The name of the party or state organ in question and date of the document has also been mentioned in parentheses, where possible, for often the number of the sheet is unreadable or the particular sheet has been labelled with several numbers. For example, f.393, op.27, d.1387, ll.17-24 or f.17, op.3, d.349 (Pp 1, 3/5-22) – Politburo protocol No. 1, 3 May 1922. f. 5263, op. 1, d.15 (pkvk 2¹, 16/4, 1932) – Protocol of the Cult Commission No. 2, 16 April 1932.

1 Протокол No. XX. При комиссии по вопросам культов = pkvk.

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I Scope

1. Introduction: scope and sources

After the breakdown of Soviet communism in 1991, Russian society went through a period of turmoil; the new postcommunist democracy held a few elections, one failed "coup d'état" in 1993, and a strange revitalization of a new kind of national communism. Despite many doubts, the leadership of Mr. Yeltsin and his presidential rule have not proved to be a kind of a "kerenskiad" or "smutnoe vremya" in the fight for political supremacy in Russia. However, one power structure seems to stand out more firmly than any other in this society. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which was officially legalized only after 1991, has been able to function as a mediator between the opposing political parties. This new political role of the church was clearly in evidence during the 1993 "putsch", when Patriarch Aleksii II tried to negotiate between Boris Yeltsin and the leaders of the rebellious coalition of Aleksandr Rutskoi and Ruslan Khasbulatov. Moreover, the ROC has been active not only in meddling in the shady situation inside Russia but also in "defending" the Russian Orthodox population inside the now independent Baltic countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).¹

To sum up, we can say that despite the general goodwill towards religion, the historical burden of the Soviet period lies heavily on the shoulders of the ROC. The question of past history is still a burning issue inside the ROC. As the so-called *Furov's Report*² clearly demonstrates, the practice of interfering in the internal affairs of the

1 On the relations between the ROC and the extreme right-wing political parties, see Parland 1995, 129–134.

2 See the text of Furov's Report: V.G. Furov: *Cadres of the Church and Legal Measures to Curtail Their Activities* – Religion in Communist Dominated Areas, Vol. XX, No. 1–3, 1981. See evaluations on Furov's Report: Oppenheim 1991, 291–311; Davies 1995, 95.

ROC was normal Soviet policy.³

Nevertheless, the background of this strange interaction between the ROC and the Soviet state has been little investigated. It is only now that the whole picture of Soviet religious policy is beginning to take shape. Thus, new historical analyses and new investigations concerning Soviet religious policy are urgently needed.

In order to discover new ways of approaching Soviet religious policy, the present monograph will focus on the history of one of its central organs in the 1930s, the so-called CSCRQ, Central Standing Commission on Religious Questions (1929–1938)⁴ and hopes to shed light on the religious policy of the Stalinist state.

We shall look into the activities of the CSCRQ, its formal structure, and main functions inside the Soviet bureaucracy. The primary aim is to present "the rise and fall" of the central CSCRQ, located in Moscow, from the perspectives of the Soviet administration and mostly in relation to the ROC. Therefore, this book will focus mainly on the central core of the Soviet institutions. For this reason, it will not stray far from the corridors of the Kremlin. The local perspective and the reality (how the orders of the Cult Commission were observed in the Soviet provinces) will be briefly examined from the viewpoint of the second capital, Leningrad.

This eclectic approach of the investigation is justified in view of the fact that only a few monographs exist on this theme and because a good many problems still remain unsolved. For example: how did the methods of Soviet religious policy develop during the 1930s, by what organs and institutions was Soviet religious policy conducted at that time, was the Soviet policy-making process simply carrying out the general political directives of the Bolshevik party or did the special Soviet religious political organs, such as the CSCRQ, have any independent status of their own? How did the centre-periphery

3 For Konstantin Kharchev's accusations about collaboration in 1989; demands of the *Russian Orthodox Church Abroad* on public repentance for past collaboration in 1990; on KGB-General Oleg Kalugin's statements on ecclesiastical KGB-agents; concerning the revealing reports of Father Vyacheslav Polosin; on Father Gleb Yakunin and journalist Aleksandr Nezhny and Sergei Avanritsev's claims that state authorities had nominated open atheists as bishops, see Davies, 1995, 46, 70–78, 95, 211.

4 The official name of this commission was "[Постоянно Действующая Комиссия При Президиуме ВЦИК по Рассмотрению Религиозных Вопросов". Henceforth referred to as *CSCRQ* or *Cult Commission*.

relationship affect Soviet religious policy? Were there any disagreements between various Soviet organs regarding how to deal with religious organizations? Did the local organs have their own special motives in their brutal persecutions of religion? Was the central government simply encouraging local Soviet officials to crush religion? Did the comrades in Moscow act as inquisitors or "guardian angels" for Soviet religious organizations in general?

After the first years of perestroika, Western scholars rushed to become acquainted with Russian/Soviet primary sources. However, once the initial spasms of euphoria⁵ were over, some started to question the actual value of these newly opened archives. As Mark von Hagen has stated...

"..the press and other media are fostering what has been called a "gold-rush" mentality by publicizing sensational finds in the archives...We return from the archives thinking that we here discovered America but are in fact often repeating – albeit with more detail – the findings of earlier scholars that were based on a very sensitive reading of the press or published material."⁶

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According to some scholars, the reliability of these archives is open to doubt partly because the Soviet decision-makers applied peculiar laws of their own. Indeed, some of the most important decisions in the Soviet period were made via telephone or private conversations. Moreover, some have even cast doubts on the primary sources because the Soviet Communist Party seems to have been utterly dishonest, falsifying its own documents. These authors have recognized the significance of these archival sources only when they have been able to confirm what had been discovered earlier. Inaccessibility to the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF) and various archives of the Soviet security organs, together with rumours about the extortion of Western scholars by Russian archive officials, has also emerged as a problem for objective research.⁷

Nonetheless, the authenticity of these documents is beyond doubt. As a rule, they were intended to be instruments of power only for a

5 See, for example, Ragsdale 1989, 269–271.

6 Hagen 1993, 96,99.

7 See editorial note of *Slavic Review* 1993, Vol. 52, No.1. "Research, Ethics and Marketplace. The Case of Russian Archives."

very select circle of the ruling party. This can be seen from special captions such as секретно, совершенно секретно, срочно секретно, абсолютно секретно, хранить конспиративно, секретный отдел, which were often prefixed to those papers. Moreover, the Soviet ideological jargon and the "double talk" that these documents often include does not diminish their historical value.

However, this critical discussion on the reliability of the archives has been most valuable for Soviet studies. Nowadays, there seems to be a generally prevailing opinion among scholars that Soviet studies require a kind of "dialectical" method, i.e., a routine of utilizing both archival and public sources simultaneously. Nevertheless, it is essential to realize that without these primary sources, even if they do contain some questionable material, we lose an invaluable insight into the ruling communist regime. To maintain that these archives amount to no more than the record-keeping of criminals would be absurd. Although we must be careful in using them, they constitute a new solid ground for Soviet studies, i.e., with newly discovered archival sources we should be able to establish the genesis and actual development of the Soviet religious-political organs.⁸

Moreover, the information originating from the Soviet archives has opened up new perspectives for estimating the role of the leadership and initiatives from above. It seems that the Soviet leadership normally made decisions by the logic of the general political situation rather than on the basis of its ideological premises. Moreover, on the evidence of the material from the archives, the whole picture of Soviet religious policy seems to have been more confused than coordinated. Different institutions seemed to have acted independently and often contrary to orders from higher authorities. Accordingly, Sheila Fitzpatrick's or Robert Tucker's concepts concerning "revolution from below" and "revolution from above"⁹ could be replaced by the term of "anarchy in the middle." It seems that especially at the beginning of the 1930s there was only a minimum amount of guidance from the top and that local officials were able to act independently, if they

8 On the historical value of the *svodki* made by informants of the GPU, see Shinkarchuk 1995, 8, 35.

9 Fitzpatrick 1984a, 10–11; Tucker 1990, 74–77. See also Gill 1990, 117. For outsiders, the Soviet society appeared to be a centralized and well-governed monolith. The reality, however, proved to be different. As James von Geldern has emphasised: "...outsiders often imagined Soviet society to be united and uniform, and insiders sometimes shared, even encouraged, the illusion." Geldern 1995, xii.

simply acknowledged, *in nomine*, the authority of Moscow, paying lip-service to its official liturgy.

The archival sources utilized in this study consist of the minutes and protocols of different organs of the state or party as well as personal files and other archival material. The main group used here are the papers and protocols of the so-called "Комиссия по вопросам культов" (CSCRQ) from the State Archive of The Russian Federation, GARF.¹⁰ The Russian Centre for the Storage & Study of Documents of Recent History, RTsKhIDNI, also contains valuable material, such as Politburo protocols with certain so-called "special folders" (особые папки).¹¹ In order to investigate the actual implementation and results of the CSCRQ's work outside its headquarters in Moscow, it is essential to scrutinize regional archives. In this study, the verification of how the Cult Commission was able to function outside the Kremlin is based on research done in the former Leningrad State Archive (TsGA SPb) in St. Petersburg.¹²

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Published primary sources are utilized in this study in order to place the activity of the commission against its proper historical background. Combining material from newspapers and Soviet periodicals as well as accounts from Soviet congresses and party conferences with archival sources has been essential to this work. This strategy is also justified in view of the fact that the whole area of Soviet religious policy is still understudied. Nearly all the previous studies depend heavily on the pre-archival investigations made before access to the archival sources was possible.

The published sources used in the present study can be divided into two categories. The first category consists of the published protocols and stenographic minutes of the congresses and conferences of the Bolshevik party. Some of these were published before Stalin's "school

10 (Государственный архив Российской Федерации, ГАРФ). Documents concerning the earlier religious policy organs, such as the Ecclesiastical Subsection of the NKVD (fond 393) and VIII (V) Section of Commissariat of Justice (fond 353), are also available.

11 Российский центр хранения и изучения документов новейшей истории. РЦХИДНИ. This archive contains the material of the earlier antireligious Committee, the САР. In 1922–1928 it was officially called "Комиссия по проведению отделения церкви от государства при ЦК РКП (б)" and from 13 July 1928 to November 1929 it was renamed "Антирелигиозная комиссия при Политбюро ЦК ВКП (б)." The party's Central Committee dissolved this commission in November 1929.

12 Центральный Государственный архив Санкт-Петербурга.

of falsification" evolved and some in the post-Stalin period.¹³ A second group is miscellaneous: edited archival material from the ROC,¹⁴ party resolutions,¹⁵ printed volumes of Soviet legislation¹⁶ or publications of party ideologists and antireligious cadres such as Em. Yaroslavsky (Emelyan [Minei] Israilevich Gubelman, 1878–1943).¹⁷

- 13 *Азбука Коммунизма (The ABC of Communism)*. Популярное объяснение программы Российской Коммунистической Партии (большевиков). Н. Бухарин. Е. Преображенский. Государственное Издательство. 1920. Петербург: Съезд Российской Коммунистической партии (большевиков). Москва: 18-23 Марта 1919 года. Стенографический отчет. Книгоиздательство "Коммунист". Москва. 1919; see XIV Всероссийский Съезд Советов. Стенографический отчет. Издание ВЦИК. 1929 Москва. Кремль. The Central Committee of the CPSU has published some useful documents and minutes of the Central Committee and Politburo. See *Известия ЦК КПСС*. Издавались в 1919–1929 гг. Возобновлены в 1989 г. Том. 4. (303). Издание Центрального Комитета КПСС. 1990. Москва. See also the documents preserved in Trotsky's archives. See, *Архив Троцкого. Коммунистическая оппозиция в СССР. Том I–IV. 1923–1927*. Ярославль. Редактор-составитель 'Фельштинский. Издательский центр "Терра". 1988. See also *The Trotsky Papers I–II, 1917–1922*. Edited and annotated by Jan Meijer. The Hague. 1971.
- 14 See Russian collection of the documents concerning the history of the Patriarchy and the ROC. See, *Акты Святейшего Патриарха Тихона и позднейшие документы о преемственности высшей церковной власти 1917–1943*. Сборник в двух частях. Составитель М.Е. Губонин. Главный редактор: протоиерей Владимир Воробьев. Издательство Православного Свято-Тихоновского Богословского Института. Москва. 1995. See also *Русская Православная Церковь и Коммунистическое Государство 1917–1941. Документы и фотоматериалы*. Издательство Библейско-Богословского Института св. апостола Андрея. 1996 (Unfortunately, this work contains some factual errors). See also a collection of documents edited by Gerd Stricker. See *Русская Православная Церковь в советское время (1917–1991) (The Orthodox Church of Russia during the Soviet Era (1917–1991) Материалы и документы по истории отношений между государством и Церковью. Книга I–II*. Составитель Герд Штриккер. Издательство "Прописи." 1995. Москва. See also new textbook for the history of the ROC, see *История Русской Православной Церкви 1917–1990 г. Учебник для православных духовных семинарии Московская Патриархия*. Издательский дом Хроника. 1994. Москва.
- 15 See, for example, *КПССvг – Коммунистическая Партия Советского Союза в резолюциях и решениях съездов, конференций и пленумов ЦК (1898–1970)*. Том I–IV. Изд. восьмое, дополненное и исправленное. Москва. 1970.
- 16 See, for example, P.V. Gidulyanov: *Отделение церкви от государства в СССР*. Printed originally in Moscow in 1926, followed by a supplement, Moscow 1928. Richmond, Surrey. 1971.
- 17 See collected works of Yaroslavsky. See, *Против религии и церкви. Том I–IV*. Огиз. Государственное антирелигиозное издательство. 1932–1935. Москва.

To mention but a few Soviet newspapers and periodicals, we may start with the mouthpiece of the ruling party, *Pravda*, and the newspaper of the Soviet government, *Izvestiya*. Moreover, *Bolshevik*, *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* (Under the Banner of Marxism) etc. are significant sources as periodicals of party ideologists. Furthermore, the Soviet antireligious newspapers such as *Antireligioznik* (of a more scholarly nature), *Bezbozhnik*, *Voinstvuyushchii Ateizm* (Militant Atheism), etc., constitute another body of sources and are worth studying as mouthpieces of the Soviet antireligious movement.

This "dialectical" use of archival and public sources can be justified for various reasons. First, the mission of the Soviet newspapers was to function as mouthpieces for the totalitarian government, as the most important instruments for mass-mobilization of the Soviet regime. Moreover, it was a common Soviet procedure to utilize newspapers as initiators of public campaigns. In their peculiar way, they often contain invaluable information in a hidden form. Also, newspapers often revealed something of the intentions of the ruling regime and also something of those particular sections of the Soviet regime they represented. The debates and intrigues of the Soviet system were usually concealed under the mask of solid ideological conformity. Although the surface seemed to be quite dogmatic, in practice there prevailed a hidden and fierce struggle between different interest groups. For example, the interests of the Comintern and Soviet antireligious institutions were not always identical.

For this reason, special attention will be paid to the role of the SVB movement (Soyuz Voinstvuyushchikh Bezbozhnikov – League of the Militant Godless).¹⁸ The Cult Commission and SVB movement had the same field of activity with overlapping missions. It is therefore natural that this study will scrutinize the sources of the League in greater detail. The League was from its beginning an auxiliary instrument in the antireligious battle. As Walter Kolarz has remarked, in the beginning the role of the Godless-movement was marginal, especially during the NEP when the Soviet regime wanted to appease peasants with concessions.¹⁹ In the early 1930s everything changed; henceforth the role of the League was more and more significant in

18 Henceforth referred to as the League or SVB.

19 Kolarz 1961, 8. See also Delaney 1971, 116.

the Soviet "Cultural Revolution" (1928–1931). In the middle of this Cultural Revolution we could say that the League of the Militant Godless and the Cult Commission were twins of Bolshevik atheist ideology – both had a common goal to reach. However, there were some differences: the League represented the far-reaching *telos* of a totally atheist Soviet society, while the Cult Commission as a state organ was obliged to comply with the often disheartening reality. The "rise and fall" of the SVB movement nearly coincides with the history of the Cult Commission. Originally, the League was an offspring of the early NEP policy. Towards the end of the Russian civil war (1918–1921), the ruling clique was anxious to settle its scores with the internal opposition, i.e., with religious organizations. The party needed a new instrument to launch this battle against religion, and the band of zealous antireligiozniki who had rallied around the weekly newspaper *Bezbozhnik* in 1922 was a suitable instrument for this purpose. After the 13th congress of the Soviet Communist Party, a special meeting of its correspondents established a society of "Friends of the Newspaper *Bezbozhnik*" and later the "League of the Militant Godless", which became a stronghold of official atheism.²⁰

2. The period under examination

The period under examination from 1929 to 1938 was the period in which the Soviet regime was dealing with almost subordinated and loyal churches and religious organizations.²¹ However, not even total compliance or servility could guarantee the safety of the religious organizations in Stalinist society. It was also a period that profoundly changed the appearance of Russian society. During collectivization, the traditional and cultural roots of the Russian countryside were turned upside down when the centuries-old system of the *mir* was destroyed. Moreover, at the time of the first *pyatiletka*, agricultural

20 On the political paradox of the early 1920s in the Soviet Union, see Schapiro 1970, 195–196; Carr 1985 II, 176–178; Brovkin 1987, 294–299; Broido 1986, 159–160. On the SVB movement, see Delaney 1971, 114–116; Newton 1990, 87–89. On the religious policy situation after the civil war, see Luukkanen 1994, 96–103.

21 See declaration of Sergii in 1927. See Fletcher 1971, 54–57; VS, 69–70, Issue No. 6. "Россия и церковь сегодня." See also Struve 1992, 188–192; Shkarovsky 1995, 368–375.

Russia rose along the trajectory of an industrialized superpower. The purges and the initiation of a reign of terror on Russian society laid the foundation for Stalinism and consequently future dilemmas experienced by the Soviet state. In a word, the cultural atmosphere of the country was transformed, the role of religion together with the whole outlook of religious organizations being deeply influenced.

The present monograph will employ a historical methodology and will be divided into three chronological sections. The second chapter, "*The great leap and hasty retreat – The years of the formation and early activities of the CSCSRQ (1929–1932)*," will investigate the political role of the CSCSRQ during the early years of its existence. In 1929 the unofficial declaration of war made by the Politburo against all religions inside the USSR was implemented by means of an informal three-step plan to crush the churches. However, Stalin's (Josif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, 1879–1953) article, "Dizzy with Success," published in March 1930, proved a bombshell which suddenly interrupted the intensive antireligious frontal attack. All Soviet officials, including the Cult Commission, were obliged to pay heed to Stalin's unexpected initiative. Although Stalin's article had a tactical purpose and its impact was quite shortlived, it represented the beginning of a sedate religious political debate inside the Soviet regime – between the CSCSRQ, the Soviet Prosecutor and local party organs. Certain Soviet state officials inside the Soviet parliament, VTsIK and the Cult Commission in Moscow now started to show some impatience with the most brutal aspects of local antireligious campaigns.

The third chapter, "*The years of stabilization and consolidation of the committee's position (1933–1935)*," deals with how the CSCSRQ attempted to consolidate its position as a leading religious political organ in the USSR. During these so-called "good years" of the 1930s, just before the commencement of the Great Purges, this organ made a serious attempt to regulate local officials and their operations. In order to perform this "pacifying" of local party officials, the Cult Commission began its counselling operations and collected statistics to show the importance of the CSCSRQ to higher officials and justify its calls for a centralized religious policy. This commission had also to comply with Soviet foreign policy and the attitude the Comintern had adopted in its fight against Nazism (the policy of the "open hand"). Consequently, members of the Cult Commission were obliged to explain and justify the Soviet religious political line to foreign guests coming to the Soviet Union.

The fourth chapter, "*The quest for unification and the years of the Great Terror (1936–1938)*," outlines the final efforts of the CSCRQ to consolidate its position. It also shows how the Great Terror of 1936–1938 had a devastating influence on the activity of the CSCRQ and the Soviet antireligious work in general. The whole work of the commission and the League were endangered by the "discovery" that there were "wreckers" or "Trotskyite-Zinovievites" inside its organization. The liquidation of the Cult Commission was executed together with the reorganization of the Soviet ruling apparatus in the late 1930s. The sudden death of the Cult Commission also revealed the fact that the Cult Commission, dedicated to Soviet religious policy could not stand against the tide of history; Stalin was finally starting to cherish the Great-Russian past and partially turning his back on his ideological heritage. The official Census of 1937²² constituted a shock to the ruling regime as it revealed a high percentage of believers. The existing organs, including the Cult Commission, proved ineffective in handling Soviet religious policy and the Soviet security apparatus displaced the latter. Moreover, the purges in the central antireligious establishment accelerated the liquidation of the Cult Commission. Henceforth, the supervision of religious affairs came directly under the jurisdiction of the Soviet security organs.²³

a. The question of Stalinism

One of the basic questions arising from the period under investigation is linked with Stalin and Stalinism. The classical question is whether this period is related to the historical role of Stalin. Was the Soviet religious policy of the 1930s merely the natural outcome of a Stalinist state or was it linked to Stalin's personality? Was it connected with his ecclesiastical background or to his desire to play the role of his notorious Russian antecedents Ivan IV, the Terrible (1530–1584), and Peter the Great (1672–1725) – thus reflecting his special psychological preferences.²⁴ The foregoing set of problems reflects the old dispute

22 For the general census of 1937. See Corley 1994, 404–410.

23 Roslof 1994, 289.

24 Agursky 1984, 1–4, 9–14; Perrie 1992, 77–78, 96–97; Nove 1993, 1–33. See also how Stalin himself established his own personal cult. In particular all official congresses and meetings of the leadership of the ruling party had a strict hierarchy of various ovations and acclamation depending on the position of the individual communist leader. Stalin, of course, received the most sychophantic and pompous

between the totalitarian school and the pluralist/revisionist school of interpreting Stalinism.²⁵ The totalitarian approach, originating from the conflicts of the Cold War, provides a solid explanation for many of Stalin's own initiatives and some of the peculiarities in the Soviet religious policy. Although the interpretations of the totalitarian school seem to be valid when dealing with Soviet ideology, the picture we receive from the archives contradicts the image of an iron-disciplined country moving according to Stalin's orders. Actually, from the point of view of the historian, the everyday Soviet reality seems to display a mixture of semichaotic actions under the monolithic surface of the ruling regime – "anarchy in the middle," as mentioned earlier.²⁶

Stalinism did its best to fuse all spheres of life under the monolithic domination of the party. Whatever the theory, in practice, this was not always the case.²⁷ The most original feature in Stalinism seems

ovations of all. When Stalin entered the speaker's podium, the congress of hurrying delegates burst into eulogies such as: "Бурная овация. все встают. возгласы -Ура!. Хай живе. товарищ Сталин!. Да здравствует вожьд партии товарищ Сталин! Долго на всех языках раздаются в зале приветствия в честь товарища Сталина!" Shinkarchuk 1995, 13–14.

25 This "classical" debate on methodology and approach in Soviet studies was published in October 1986 in the *Slavic Review*. In her polemical article, Sheila Fitzpatrick demanded a new approach (social history) to studies of Stalinism and argued that the traditional state/society approach "encourages scholars to investigate the state mechanism rather than social processes". Fitzpatrick 1986, 359. Other scholars ("totalitarians") criticized this, believing that the "revisionist" approach was trying to absolve the crimes of Stalin's regime. Together with these disagreements, the participants in this debate resorted very often to moral judgements. As Alfred G. Meyer stated, this moral issue made the debate more than heated. "...In short, neither the old cohort of the totalitarians school nor the present-day revisionists deny that some dreadful things happened during the reign of Stalin. Their argument is only over who is to be blamed for them." Meyer 1986, 405. See also *Russian Review*, 1987. Vol.46, No.4. For shorter introductions to this classical discussion, see Fitzpatrick 1993b, 77-83; McCauley 1995, 78-88. Also, for a summary of the *Russian Review* debate, see Andrie 1996, 25–34. See also discussions on Stalinism, totalitarianism and pluralism: Tucker 1977, xii–xiii; Cohen 1977, 3–12; Campeanu 1986, 51–52; Getty 1993, 104–117, 121–129, 137–142; Vihavainen 1997, 122–123. See the excellent monograph of Roger Pethybridge: *The Social Prelude to Stalinism*. The MacMillan Press. London & Basingstoke. 1974. For studies of new cohorts of historians, see Stephen Kotkin's magnificent history of Stalinism and the 1930s from the point of view of Magnitogorsk. See *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization*. University of California Press. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London. 1995.

26 Fitzpatrick 1993b, 82–83.

27 This confusion between ideology and everyday life was actually revealed by Gorbachov's perestroika. As James R. Ozinga has stated, M.S. Gorbachov "acted like a Martin Luther who wanted to become a different kind of Roman Catholic

to have been a sharp dichotomy between the infallible political theory and the real world, between the idealistic *Homo Socialisticus* of theory and the *homunculus* of reality. Stalin tried to solve this problem by terror, implying that socialism could be created if there would be no lurking enemies. This distinction between the evil of the present and good potential worlds, between the militant reality and the glorified *telos* of communist society, was as clear as St. Augustine's ideas on the differences between the *Civitas dei* and *Civitas diaboli*. Or as Gábor Rittersporn has stated, this contradiction of reality and the propagated ideal of communism could be explained by Stalin's favourite idea concerning the "omnipresent conspiracy." To quote Rittersporn, the paranoia of enemies and wreckers...

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"...became central paradigms by which the régime sought to explain political processes and social conflicts, and official as well popular milieux were disposed to suspect the work of subversive machinations behind the apparently inexplicable turmoil that turned into an unmanageable daily reality..."²⁸

When considering the personal convictions of Stalin himself, it appears that his position was based on a low level of ideological conviction. This is quite striking – as we know, Stalin had a religious background and a theological education. Considering this, we may get the impression that Marxism was for him something more concrete than it was for, e.g., Lenin or Trotsky. The latter came from a prosperous background and had possibilities for advancement in the autocratic Russian society. For Stalin, turning to socialism amounted to more than adopting a totally new view of the world. It was, actually, a new form of "religion," which pushed aside Orthodox faith and Georgian nationality. It is therefore rather surprising that Stalin did not, for example, profess any particularly atheist conviction. Stalin presented very few antireligious arguments and there seems to be no basis for talking about "Stalin's religious policy" as such. He was relatively indifferent to the ideological reasons for the antireligious struggle, which, considering his own background, is somewhat

rather than a different sort of Christian." Ozinga 1992, 28. However, "the anarchy in the middle" was stronger than Gorbachov's attempts to reform the Soviet system.

28 Rittersporn 1996, 102. See also Hellbeck 1996, 345, 349–355.

surprising. For example, in his interview with American communists, Stalin stressed that it was not necessary to be an atheist when being a member of the party. He added, however, that the party could not be neutral in relation to religion because the party stood for science and religion for its part was against science.²⁹ It would appear that the great ruler of the Marxist state was not so interested in the ideological side of "the Storming of Heaven." For Stalin, there were no such obstacles as God, ideology, friends or relatives. He was able to get rid of his best friends or modify Bolshevik ideology when they proved to be obstacles in his path to supreme power.³⁰

b. The historical background of the study

Various stereotypes exist concerning Soviet religious policy during the first decades after the October Revolution of 1917. However, the reality proved to be rather different from these cruder stereotypes, which visualized Soviet religious policy as a never-ending horror story.

First, the early religious policy of the Bolshevik party was vacillating; there being hardly any co-operation between different factions of the communist regime in this matter. Several *ad hoc* commissions and organs were put in charge of dealing with religion.³¹ Secondly, the early decades of Soviet power cannot be portrayed simply as an era of merciless persecution of the ROC, right from the very beginning and with accelerating tempo.³² In actual fact, Bolshevik religious policy was not formed on the basis of its ideological

29 SS 10, 131–133. "Беседа с первой американской рабочей делегацией"; Deutscher 1967, 26, 35; Billington 1970, 534–535; Tucker 1990, 3–7. Dimitry Volkogonov has given an interesting depiction of the principles behind Stalin's order to his personal secretary I.P. Tovstukha (1889–1935) in relation to the establishment of the Gensecs private library. Stalin stipulated that "antireligious literature fit for pulp" should not be included in his library. "...исключив из классификации и отложив в сторону: учебники всякие, мелкие журналы, антирелигиозную макулатуру и т.п." See also Volkogonov 1989, 119–120; Ree 1997, 23–24. For opposite opinion, see preface written by Lars Lih: *Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925–1936*. Edited by Lars Lih, Oleg V. Naumov and Oleg V. Khlevniuk. Yale University Press. 1995.

30 See Milovan Djilas's opinion of Stalin's political and moral cynicism. Djilas 1962, 110–115, 142–145, 153, 174–177. See also a psychoanalytical investigation of Stalin's "irrational" behaviour, see Rancour-Lafferiére 1988, 18–19, 24–25, 54.

31 Luukkanen 1994, 64–65, 101.

32 Pospelovskiy 1987, x, 4–5.

premises, but by the general political situation and sudden changes in the power struggle inside the Soviet regime.³³ Moreover, on questions of religious policy the Bolshevik party itself was divided into two basic factions, "doves" and "hawks." Points of disagreement lay mainly in the tactics to be employed in religious policy; no one in the ruling party denied the importance of the class struggle and the fight against religion. The main argument of the "doves" was that brutal actions against believers and especially against peasants could endanger the revolution.³⁴ Some authoritative members of the party, such as V. D. Bonch-Bruевич (1873–1955) and L. B. Kamenev (Rosenfeld, 1883–1936)³⁵, had influential positions inside the Soviet regime and could actually establish more tactful relations with religious organizations.

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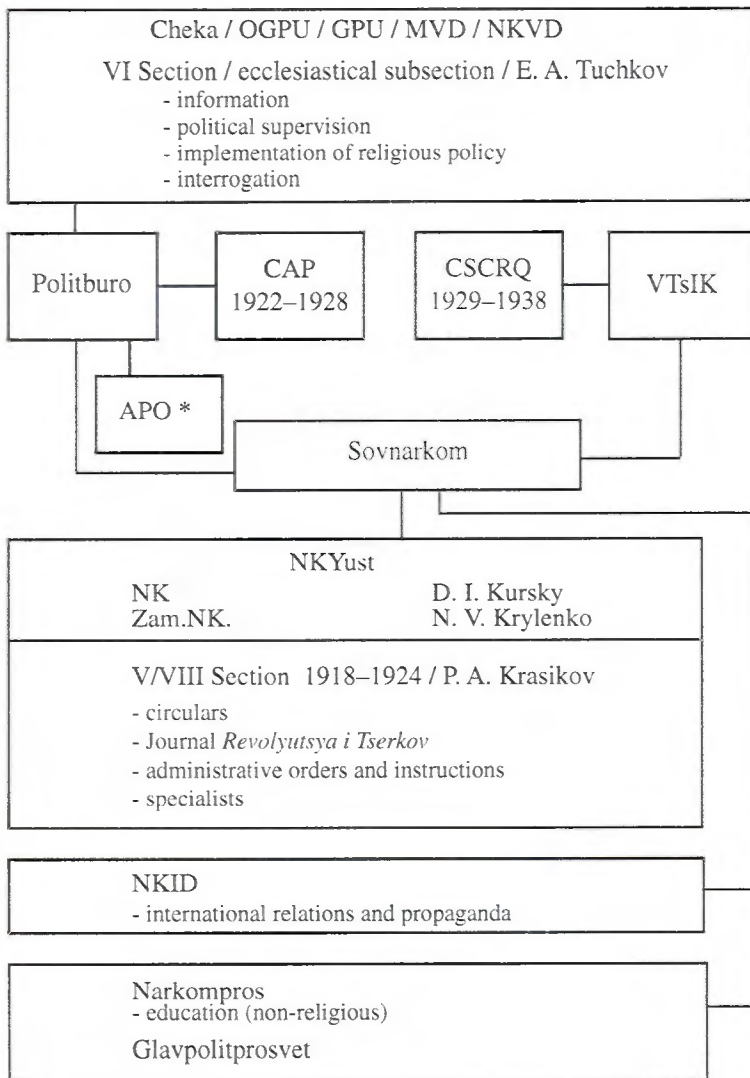
The "hawks" were located in the Komsomol and to some extent in the Commissariat of Justice (See Table I.1.). These organs were filled with more ideologically-minded communists. Nonetheless, during the civil war the religious policy of the ruling party constituted a compromise between these two factions. Terror and sporadic violent actions were officially directed only against politically hostile clergymen, but on a local level Bolshevik terror tended to be "pre-emptive" in nature. In accordance with their "isolation policy", the Bolsheviks even attempted to encourage "neutral" priests. Only during the most ferocious battles of the civil war did the Soviet regime decide to move systematically against the monasteries. Especially during the NEP, the religious policy approach of the communist regime included "soft" techniques such as enticing leading clergymen to collaborate with the Soviet system. Moreover, inside the ruling regime there was a substantial group of communist leaders, e.g., L.B. Kamenev, M.I. Kalinin (1875–1946) and V.D. Bonch-Bruевич, who favoured adopting sectarians as models for Soviet agriculture. The founder of the Soviet state, Lenin himself, seemed to accept the experimental sectarian collectives as models for future Soviet agriculture. It is probable that Lenin and these moderate leaders

33 See RTsKhIDNI f. 150, op. 1, d. 62. "Церковь и государство в СССР (1923)." Curtiss 1953, 89. The communist regime was especially cautious not to revitalize links between religion and nationality, see AK, 201.

34 See, for example, BB I, 351–354; S13, 472–477; Winter 1972, 24–25. See also Pravda 15 May 1924, No.108.

35 See Merridale 1995, 22–24, 34–37.

Table I.1. Organizational structure of Soviet religious-political organs 1922–1938



*) Special section for coordinating party's agitation and propaganda.

preferred a more gradual tempo on the path towards socialism and in the antireligious struggle.³⁶

On the one hand, the ideological confrontation between Marxism and religion, together with the historical background of the Bolshevik party, made relations between the religious organizations and the Soviet rulers more tense. But on the other hand, the general political situation and sudden turns in the power struggle inside the ruling party were nonetheless more influential in this field. When confronting political reality, the Bolsheviks were able to push their ideology and historical aversions aside. The religious policy of the Bolshevik party was guided more by the political reality than by ideology.

The explanation for this cautious Bolshevik approach was obvious. Their ambition was to drive religion to the margins of society, and in doing so they had no qualms about terrorizing and executing people linked to religion but the ROC remained a significant political force in Soviet Russia during the 1920s. This was especially apparent during the civil war, when religious questions were only of secondary importance to the ruling regime. The Bolsheviks were fighting for their survival and the ROC was allowed to continue its basic functions as before, as long as it did not engage in activities directly hostile to the Soviet regime. Finally, after the October Revolution and especially after the civil war, the new government soon realized that the ROC was deeply rooted in the traditional Russian society.³⁷ By their early legislative acts, the Bolsheviks were able to build only some of the foundations of a secularized state.³⁸

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36 The ruling regime was at that time trying to establish better links with sectarians by creating a special commission to deal with this matter. See RTsKhIDNI f. 5, op. 2, d. 55, l.38. See also facts on the special communist commission dedicated to work among the sectarians "Orgkomsekt". See GARF f. 353, op. 8, d. 8. "Записка о восстановлении деятельности особой комиссии "Оргкомсект" при наркомземе и особой реформе по сектантскому вопросу в связи с постановлениями XIII съезда РКП." See also how Soviet officials assisted the sectarians in the early 1920s: VSS VII, 228; Izvestiya, 19 October 1921, No. 234. The Soviet regime allowed sectarians to act relatively freely during the high NEP (1924–1927). However, the civil peace of "religious NEP" did not prevent political supervision of the security organs. Luukkanen 1994, 181–185.

37 See especially RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op.3, d. 1 "Всероссийское совещание заведующих агитотделами губкомов и областкомов РКП 7-11 мая 1921"; RTsKhIDNI f.89, op.4, d.184 "Всем обкомам, облбюро и губкомам Р.К.П. о постановке антирелигиозной пропаганды. Циркулярно. б/д." See also KPSSvr II, 243; Curtiss 1953, 104–105.

38 See early Bolshevik legislation on the church-state relationship: SU I, 260–261;

The secularization of the Soviet state was put under the Soviet judicial system; under central "Liquidation Committee"³⁹ and a network of local "Liquidation Committees" were given the responsibility for stripping away the vestiges of religion from Soviet society. Moreover, the Soviet security organ, the Cheka (later GPU, OGPU), and its 6th section had shown a keen interest in Soviet religious policy. The Cheka, together with the NKVD's "Ecclesiastical Subsection", worked mainly as supervisory organs in Soviet religious policy, but they also functioned as the "strong arm" of the communist regime. The security apparatus performed the dirty work by arresting, interrogating, imprisoning, and executing the servants of religious cults who were categorized as enemies of the existing order. The Cheka's special commission, the so-called "Ispolkomdukh" also exercised more refined methods by attempting to entice the high clergy to abandon their ecclesiastical duties.⁴⁰ Later, when the civil war was over, the party consolidated its role in Soviet religious policy. At first, Trotsky was the leader of the APO and the main executive in the "confiscation-conflict" of 1921–1922.⁴¹ Moreover, it seems most likely that only a small inner circle of the communist regime (Trotsky's commission and the inner circle of the Politburo: the already incapacitated Lenin, Stalin, and Molotov) was in charge of the "confiscation conflict" of 1921–1922. This operation had two political objectives: firstly, the confiscation of valuables from churches was done in order to finance Soviet power; secondly, Trotsky's plan (fully accepted by Lenin)⁴² had the strategic goal of undermining the

DSV I, 371–374. See also the publication of the "separation-decree": *Izvestiya*, 21 January 1918, No.16(280). See also SURa, 685; ORTs, 82-84. See the documents and legislation on the first Soviet Constitution 1918: GARF f. 6980, op.1.; DSV II, 552–554.

39 This organ was led by P.A. Krasikov (1870-1939). The official name of this commission was "The Department for Implementing the Separation of Church and State" (Отдел по проведению в жизнь декрета об отделении церкви от государства). See also Luchterhand 1993, 55.

40 See NR, 34. "Письмо заведующего секретным отделом ВЧК Т.П. Самсонова Ф.Э. Дзержинскому 4 декабря 1920 г."

41 See ТТР II, 670–672.

42 See the "famous" letter of Lenin which seems to be more a report about a trauma than a real directive or order for the security apparatus. In this letter Lenin urged the Politburo to act without mercy and hesitation. The famine in Volga area would have been a good pretext so that the Soviet power could root out the ecclesiastical opposition. According to Lenin, the populace would accept the terror against the clergy. Moreover, a few days after dictating this letter, Lenin suffered a second

authority of the ROC. In order to weaken resistance among believers, Trotsky introduced a policy of fomenting schisms inside all the religious organizations in Russia. Trotsky's ultimate political objective seems to have been nothing less than the total destruction of the ROC and other religious organizations.⁴³

It was not too difficult for Trotsky to foment a schism within the ROC; social tensions between "white" and "black" clergy could easily be exploited by the communist regime. Moreover, as a result of the "confiscation conflict", the ROC was forced to change its policy from hostile neutrality to one of loyalty. The case of Patriarch Tikhon (Belavin, Vasily Ivanovich, 1865–1925) reveals how effectively the ruling regime was able to exploit the antagonism between the ROC and the Renovationists, The Living Church movement.

36

As already stated, Lenin's illness complicated the situation within the Soviet leadership. As soon as Lenin became seriously ill without hope of recovery, Trotsky's position was at risk and the triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev had a free hand to alter the direction of Soviet religious policy. One of the main reasons for the change was the triumvirate's desire to discredit Trotsky during the hidden power struggle. In order to do so, the triumvirate and, especially, G.E. Zinoviev (Radomyslsky, Grigory Evseevich, 1883–1936) introduced slogans that contradicted Trotsky's more aggressive policy by appealing the peasants and the neutral intelligentsia.⁴⁴ Moreover, certain members of the Soviet government, for example, from the Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, had appealed to Stalin to pacify the "hawks" in the Soviet leadership.⁴⁵ The decline of Trotsky and the rise of Stalin were among the salient features of 1923. Stalin's position was further secured when he was appointed General Secretary of the party in 1922 and was given the task of harmonizing different party organs. Consequently, it was a simple enough task for him to

stroke. See IzvTsK KPSS 1990, 192–193. See also PSS 45, 666–667. It seems, that Trotsky was a mastermind behind the whole operation, see Trotsky's secret letter to Lenin (dated 30 January 1922) in which he hints that the confiscation of the ecclesiastical valuables was under "political" preparation on different levels in order to avoid publicity and to keep this matter hidden from the foreign press. See TTP II, 670–672.

43 RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 3, d. 280 (Pp 111, 13/3–22); IzvTsK KPSS 1990, No. 4, 192–194. See also Luukkanen 1996, 31–45.

44 Compare S12, 44; S12, 716 and KPSSvr II, 469–472.

45 GARF f. 5446e, op. 55, op. 409 "Тов. Сталину. Секретарю ЦК РКП. 1 апреля 1923 г."

wrest control of the party's antireligious work away from Trotsky. At the same time, the triumvirate of Zinovev, Kamenev and Stalin halted the antireligious campaigns of the early NEP.

At the same time as Trotsky's authority was diminishing, the official Commission of Antireligious Propaganda, CAP,⁴⁶ took control of Soviet religious policy. Especially the CAP possessed substantial authority as an organ planning and coordinating Soviet religious policy. The network that this agency had built up with its members drawn from the Soviet judicial and security apparatus enabled the commission to function.

The 12th party congress in 1923 was a turning point in Soviet religious policy. It seems that Trotsky himself had prepared the outlines of the resolution concerning religious organizations. However, Zinovev and the other members of the triumvirate nullified Trotsky's more aggressive resolution with their conciliatory speeches.⁴⁷ In order to appease the peasants and discredit Trotsky's antireligious campaigns during the early NEP, the triumvirate adopted a more conciliatory attitude towards religion. This also meant that the party was obliged to turn away from the antireligious methods of the early NEP to peaceful techniques such as the propaganda and agitation of the high NEP. The 12th congress was from this point of view the beginning of a new religious policy, "religious NEP", representing the start of organized antireligious propaganda in place of administrative measures.

To summarize the organizational view of Soviet religious policy at the height of the NEP: the party's religious policy was concentrated in special supervisory and governing organs (the CAP and the secret police). The Fifth Division of the Commissariat of Justice was abolished and the role of the APO diminished to nil. As before, real decisions were made in small circles of the party: during Lenin's time, in the Sovnarkom, the Politburo, and in Trotsky's antireligious commission. Important decisions were always taken in the Politburo, and, during the high NEP, also in the CAP. Moreover, there were real open debates inside the party before and during the 12th and the 13th congresses, but in practice religious policy decisions were made in closed party circles.

46 See RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op.112, d. 378, rol. 197, l. 4.

47 Compare KPSSvr II, 469-472 and S12, 39, 44-45, 716. See also Luukkanen 1996, 41-45.

The new method that the ruling party developed during the "confiscation conflict" involved the creating of a loyal wing inside a particular religious organization. This method suited the "peaceful" NEP period better and active participation by the representatives of the Soviet regime often produced more effective results than plain terror could have done. The main objective of the high NEP religious policy was to create loyal churches with pro-Soviet attitudes. In practice, this simply amounted to promoting an internal schism in the ROC. The Renovationist church had only tactical value for the Soviet regime. The schism was initially planned as a temporary measure and when the loyal Renovationists attempted to secure their position the government abandoned the Living Church.⁴⁸

Finally we can say that despite sporadic and often merciless waves of terror in the civil war and during the "confiscation-conflict" at the beginning of the NEP, the years of the high NEP represented a brief breathing-space for all religious organizations. Indeed, for the sectarian movement it was a period of great success. The split in the SVB movement between the followers of M.M. Kostelovskaya (1878–1964) and those of Yaroslavsky, together with the religious policy debate among the high officials in 1926, clearly bear witness to this. At the same time, the high NEP reached its peak at the 15th Party Congress in 1927. During the Cultural Revolution, the Bolshevik party turned more to the policy of direct attack on all "class enemies", and the religious organizations were the first to suffer.⁴⁹

3. Earlier studies and basic concepts

a. "Pre-archival" studies

Monographs investigating the religious policy of the Soviet regime might be classified in many ways. Perhaps the best way is to divide them chronologically into those published during the Cold War and those written after the opening of the Soviet archives. The best of the "pre-archive" monographs employ a politically dispassionate style and utilize a massive stock of primary and secondary sources. The strength

48 Luukkanen 1994, 127–128, 132–135.

49 Luukkanen 1994, 200–202; Peris 1995, 351.

of these older studies, as for example, those of John S. Curtiss, lies in the systematic way in which they utilized published material.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, certain earlier Western studies dealing with the problems of church-state relationships in the Soviet Union carry the

50 See John S. Curtiss: *The Russian Church and the Soviet State 1917–1950*. 1965. Little Brown & Co. Boston. Gerhard Simon: *Church, State and Opposition in the USSR*. 1974. Hurst. London. Pedro Ramet: *Cross and Commissar: The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR*. Indiana University Press. 1987. Bloomington, Indianapolis. William C. Fletcher: *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917–1970*. Oxford University Press. 1971. London. On the battle between Komsomol and Christian organizations, see David E. Powell: *Religion and Youth in the Soviet Union – Politics and The Soviet System. Essays in Honour of Frederick C. Barghoorn*. Edited by Thomas F. Remington. MacMillan Press. 1989. Basingstoke. On the nationality question and religion, see Pedro Ramet: *The Interplay of Religious and Nationalities Policy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe – Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*. Edited by Pedro Ramet. Duke Press Policy Studies. Revised and expanded edition. Duke University Press. 1989. Durham and London. On the legal status of religion, see Joshua Rothenberg: *The Legal Status of Religion in The Soviet Union – Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union 1917–1967*. Edited by Richard H. Marshall, Jr. Associate Editors, Thomas E. Bird and Andrew Q. Blane. The University of Chicago Press. 1971. Chicago. See also Albert Boiter: *Law and Religion in the Soviet Union – The American Journal of Comparative Law*. A Quarterly. 1/1987. Vol. 35. American Association for the Comparative Study of Law, Inc. 1987. Berkeley, California. Concerning the historical role of the Russian peasantry and their religious practices, see Moshe Lewin: *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*. Translated by Irene Nove with the assistance of John Biggart. With a Preface by Alec Nove. Northwestern University Press. George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1968. London. See also *Society, State and Ideology during the First Five-Year Plan – Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931* by the same author. Edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick. Indiana University Press. 1984. Bloomington and London. And especially his excellent work *The Making of The Soviet System. Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia*. Pantheon Books. 1985. New York. With regard to the collectivization and its impact to the ROC, see Robert Conquest: *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. Arrow Books. 1986. London. See also the same author's general introduction to the religious political situation in the USSR: *Religion in the USSR*. Soviet Studies Series. The Bodley Head. 1968. London. With regard to the sociological dimension of the ROC. See Christel Lane: *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union: A Sociological Study*. Allen & Unwin. 1978. London. See also her work *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society – The Soviet Case*. Cambridge University Press. 1981. Cambridge. With regard to the development of atheism as part of Soviet ideology, see Peter van den William Bercken: *Ideology and Atheism in the Soviet Union*. Translated from the Dutch by H.Th. Wake. Religion and Society; 28. Mouton de Gruyter. 1989. Berlin. Concerning the SVB movement, see: Joan Delaney: *The Origins of Soviet Antireligious Organizations – Aspects of Religion in The Soviet Union 1917–1967*. Edited by Richard H. Marshall Jr. Associate Editors, Thomas E. Bird and Andrew Q. Blane. The University of Chicago Press. 1971. Chicago.

burden of the Cold War or are loaded with missionary overtones and a stigma of partiality. They often lack deeper historical analysis or contain hardly any discussion on other studies on the Soviet Union. Moreover, these studies are overwhelmingly based on second-hand stories of *samizdat* or emigré sources, which scarcely show any hint of criticism of these sources. It may be that in some cases the speculations contained in these studies have been shown to be valid. However, it is regrettable that they transformed the history of the ROC and other religious groups into a "*historia sacra*", emphasizing the never-ending *martyria* of heroic Christians and heaping anathema upon their wicked adversaries, the Bolsheviks and their opportunistic hirelings, the Living Church, etc. Thus, bitter hostility against communism and atheism created an *apotheosis* of the ROC and Christians in general.⁵¹ There is a considerable difference of opinion

51 See, Trevor Beeson: *Discretion and Valour. Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe*. With a foreword by Sir John Lawrence. Collins. 1974. Glasgow. See also Michael Bourdeaux: *Candle in the Wind*, edited by Eugene B. Shirley Jr. and Michael Rowe. See also a book by the same author: *Patriarch and Prophets: Persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church Today*. And *Opium of the People. The Christian Religion in the U.S.S.R.* 1965. London. See also, Father Mikhail (Михаил Польский): *Положение церкви в Советской России*. Очерк бежавшего из России священника. 1931 Иерусалим. 1995. Санкт-Петербург. As an example of another kind of strong conviction than religious, see Robert Blick: *The Seeds of Evil. Lenin and the Origins of Bolshevik Élitism*. Second Revised Edition. Steyne Publications, London. 1995. Blick's book is a fine representative of a biased political study. Thus, having a "deutscherian" outlook and a Trotskyite central idea, it fails to meet the stylistic splendour and scientific interest of Mr. Deutscher. On religiously-motivated studies with a relatively wide focus, see a contribution by Johannes Chrysostomus: *Kirchengeschichte Rußlands der neuesten Zeit. II Das Moskauer Patriarchat ohne Patriarchen 1925–1943*. Anton Pustet München/Salzburg. 1966. See also a "masterpiece" of the Cold War attitudes: *The Communist Conspiracy. Strategy and Tactics of World Communism*. Prepared and released by the Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of representatives, Washington, D.C. 1956. See also three classics of church-state studies, Walter Kolarz: *Religion in The Soviet Union*. MacMillan. 1961. London. See also Bohdan R. Bociurciw: *Church-State Relations in the USSR. – Religion and the Soviet State: A Dilemma of Power*. Edited by Max Hayward and William C. Fletcher. Published for the Centre de Recherches et d'Etude des Institutions Religieuses by Pall Mall Press. 1969. London. William Chaunchay Emhardt: *Religion in Soviet Russia*. Morehouse Publishing Co. Milwaukee Wis. 1929. See a work done by emigré author, Wassilij Alexeev: *Religion in Communist Land*. Vol. 7. No. 1. Spring 1979. Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism. Compton Press. 1979. Tisbury, Wilts. On Marxist-Leninist ideology, see J.M. Bohenski: *Marxism-Leninism and Religion – Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe*. Edited by Bohdan R. Bociurciw and John W. Strong. Assisted by Jean K. Laux. Carleton University.

regarding the fate of the church found in the two categories of studies mentioned. These disagreements are clearly seen in the case of the Renovationalist schism. As Edward Roslof has pointed out, authors such as Curtiss and Philip Walters have described the Renovationalists with great impartiality, picturing them as sincere reformists of the ROC. Moreover, as Roslof has remarked, D.V. Pospelovsky, as a typical representative of emigré authors sees (despite utilizing the same sources) nothing positive in the Living Church movement.⁵²

Generally speaking, the foregoing contradiction could be perceived as reflecting the contradiction between studies based on public sources and those based on *samizdat* sources. The positive evaluations based on public sources have often attempted to detect the real motivations

MacMillan. 1975. London. See also certain studies dedicated to theological purposes and written by emigré authors. An exceptionally fine volume concerning the history of the ROC written by Anatoly Levitin & Vadim Shavrov: *Очерки по истории русской церковной смуты* (Essays on the History of Russian Ecclesiastical Disturbances). В 3 томах. Institut Glaube in Der 2. Welt. CH-8700 Küsnacht. 1978. Schweiz. Constantin de Grunwald: *God and The Soviets*. Translated by G.J. Robinson-Paskevsky. Hutchinson Co. Ltd. London. 1961. Lev Regelson: *Трагедия Русской Церкви 1917–1945* (The Tragedy of the Russian Church 1917–1945). 1977. Paris. See also Nikita Struve: *Christians in Contemporary Russia*. Translated by Lancelot Sheppard and A. Manson. Harvill Press. 1967. London and especially Dimitry V. Pospelovsky: *The Russian Church Under The Soviet Regime 1917–1982*. Vol. I. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1984. See also Marite Sapiets: *Anti-Religious Propaganda and Education. – Candle in the Wind: Religion in the Soviet Union*. Edited by Eugene B. Shirley, Jr. and Michael Rowe. Foreword by Richard Schifter. Ethics and Public Policy Centre. 1989. Washington D.C., Crestwood, New York. See also Harwey Fireside: *Icon and Swastika. The Russian Orthodox Church under Nazi and Soviet Control*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1971. Some of these authors have even tried to "rehabilitate" their earlier contributions with new archive studies. Interestingly enough, primary archives have often only "verified" earlier findings and paradigmas. Compare Dimitry V. Pospelovsky's trilogy "*A History of Atheism in Theory and Practise, and the Believer I–III*". MacMillan, New York: St. Martin's 1987–1988. and his *Русская православная церковь в XX веке*. Издательство "Республика". 1995. Москва. According to Pospelovsky "...Западные авторы, опубликовавшие несколько десятков работ на английском, немецком и других языках по интересующему нас вопросу, делятся на две группы: активистов разных христианских групп и организаций по распространению Слова Божьего в тогдашних странах Восточного блока и серьезных ученых – историков, социологов, политологов, богословов." Pospelovsky 1995, 5. Mr. Pospelovsky obviously places himself in the second category, although some of the scholars in this field have criticized him for neglecting primary sources. See how Professor Roy R. Robson actually charges D.V. Pospelovsky with altering the solid principle of historiography – *ad fontes* to the principle of *adios fontes*. See Robson 1995, 253. Roslof 1994, 8. See also Luukkanen 1995, 186–188.

and objectives of the Soviet regime, treating the communist system with Westernlike rationality. The negative evaluations, on the other hand, have regarded communism as an heir of satanism and the Bolshevik regime as a band of ordinary gangsters.⁵³ For these people, the history of the ROC and other religious organizations consisted of nothing but constant purges and bloodbaths right from the beginning of Soviet power. It is quite obvious that when investigating the methods of Bolshevik religious policy we may end up concluding that this problem could be dealt with better by criminological methods (or by discussing with theologians versed in demonology). In many cases, the Communist oligarchy did not differ from a well organized band of gangsters; Stalin himself earned his initial reputation as an organizer of bank robberies, etc. However, if we were to write only the history of morally distinguished people, we would certainly be left with very few opportunities for historical research. Moreover, when discussing the history of the Soviet era, one can not always avoid making moral judgements.

However, the quest for heroes and villains – or introducing idols and scapegoats on the scene of history – is not, at least in the opinion of the author of the present study, the basic mission of historiography. The primary goal of historians is not to establish "eternal truth" or argue for moral values or eulogize the winners of history and curse the losers. As Chris Ward has pointed out:

..."historians should try to see all round a problem; to understand and make comprehensible old policies, old factions and past lives. And understanding – that effort to suspend disbelief and enter into a world of men and women for whom we may now have no particular sympathy – requires more than a modicum of empathy...understanding the oppressors, however, – the NKVD operative, the Mississippi slaveowner, the money-grabbing Lancashire capitalist, the Roman patriarch or the interrogators of the Holy Inquisition – is probably an unattractive proposition, even though we are not required to share their view of the world. We are obliged, however, to realize that it was their view of their world..."⁵⁴

53 See Berdyaev 1994(1933), 411–412.

54 Ward 1993, 228–229.

However, the critical discussion that has been presented against the "fellow-travellers" or those presenting a more positive picture of the Communist regime has been most valuable. The generation of Edward Hallett Carr and Isaac Deutscher was, no doubt, mesmerized by the colossal achievements they thought that the Soviet power had achieved. Their hypotheses and basic assumptions were clear: the Soviet system, despite its failures and excesses, was a positive phenomenon and the foundations of the Soviet system were stable.⁵⁵

b. "Post-archival" studies

The "post-archival" studies and articles that seek to investigate church-state relations and the formation of Soviet religious policy involve both Russian and Western researchers. With respect to Western studies, mention might be made of John Anderson's *The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy*⁵⁶, which analyzes the formal structures of Soviet religious political organs. Otto Luchterhand, in his article *The Council for Religious Affairs*, has also made a valuable contribution with this

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- 55 See Edward Hallett Carr: *1917: Before and After*. MacMillan. London. 1969. For an "apologetic" monograph on Stalin, see Isaac Deutscher: *Stalin: A Political Biography*. Second Edition. Oxford University Press. 1967. London. And also for his somewhat "positive evaluations" on post-Stalinist Russia, *Russia after Stalin*. Hamish Hamilton. Ltd. 1953. As examples of these Western scholars of a pro-Marxist persuasion, see Schlesinger 1965, 84–87; Braverman 1967, 22–28; Huberman & Sweezy 1967 9–21.
- 56 See John Anderson: *The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy*. Soviet Studies. A Journal on the USSR and Eastern Europe. Vol. 43. No. 4. Glasgow University Press. 1991. Glasgow. Some of these "post-archival" authors have specialized in questions such as the conflict between the Renovatationist Orthodox Church and the ROC in the 1920s. See Philip Walters: *The Renovatationist Coup: Personalities and Programmes. – Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*. Edited by Geoffrey A. Hosking. MacMillan in Association with the SSEES, University of London. MacMillan. 1991. London. See also his article *A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy – Religious Policy in The Soviet Union*. Edited by Sabrina Petra Ramet. Cambridge University Press. 1993. Cambridge. See also Catherine Gousseff's article with some accounts from the Soviet archives: *Le schisme rénovateur: un mouvement pro-communiste dans l'église russe – Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*. 3–4 (septembre-décembre). 1993. Paris. On educational matters and Soviet power, see Larry E. Holmes: *Fear No Evil: Schools and Religion in Soviet Russia, 1917–1941*. Religious Policy in the Soviet Union. Edited by Sabrina Petra Ramet. Cambridge University Press. 1993. Cambridge.

theme.⁵⁷

Growing numbers of Western authors have been able to work with primary sources and are spreading their archival activity from central to local archives. As a result of this massive archival work, a number of excellent pieces of scholarly research have appeared, such as Daniel Peris's article *The 1929 Congress of the Godless*, in which he outlines the 1929 Congress of the Godless-movement.⁵⁸ His more recent article, *Commissars in Red Cassocks: Former Priests in the League of the Militant Godless*, deals with those priests who changed their loyalty and turned to atheism.⁵⁹ Also, a fine article by Gregory Freeze on the fate of the Renovationists on the parish level is in a league of its own.⁶⁰

Works by Soviet historians on the question of Soviet religious policy are usually little worth. Although, after Stalin's death, slight changes occurred in the dogmatic treatment of history, ideological premises nonetheless dictated Soviet history writing. As a rule, these works reflect the ideological stiffness of the Soviet oligarchy and contain very little primary information.⁶¹ Emigré authors such as

57 See Otto Luchterhand: *The Council for Religious Affairs. – Religious Policy in The Soviet Union*. Edited by Sabrina Petra Ramet. Cambridge University Press. 1993. Cambridge.

58 Daniel Peris. *The 1929 Congress of the Godless*. Soviet Studies. A Journal on the USSR and Eastern Europe. Vol. 43. No. 4. 1991. Glasgow.

59 Daniel Peris. *Commissars in Red Cassocks: Former Priests in the League of the Militant Godless*. Slavic Review. American Quarterly of Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies Vol. 54, No. 2 (Summer). 1995.

60 See Gregory Freeze: *Counter-reformation in Russian Orthodoxy: Popular Response to Religious Innovation, 1922–1925. – Slavic Review*. American Quarterly of Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies Vol. 54, No. 2 (Summer). 1995. There are also a few unpublished dissertations on the relations between Renovationists and Tikhonites, see: Edward Eldon Roslof: *The Renovatist Movement in The Russian Orthodox Church, 1922–1946*. 1994. University of North Carolina. Daniel Peris: *Storming of Heavens: The Soviet League of the Godless and Bolshevik Political Culture in the 1920s and 1930s*. 1994. University of Illinois. 1994. For a fine dissertation on peasants and their religion, see Glennys Jeanne Young, *Rural Religion and Soviet Power, 1921–1932*. Diss. University of California. 1989. Berkeley, California. See also the published dissertation of the author of this work, Arto Luukkanen: *The Party of Unbelief. The Religious Policy of the Bolshevik Party, 1917–1929*. Studia Historica 48. Societas Historica Finlandiae. 1994. Helsinki. See also Roslof's article: *The Heresy of "Bolshevik" Christianity: Orthodox Rejection of Religious Reform during NEP* in Slavic Review. See also the only published short article concerning the history of the CSCRQ. Terry D. Martin: *Cults Commission – The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and The Soviet Union*. Vol. 6. 1995. Academic International Press.

Mikhail Geller, Aleksandr Nekrich and Andrei Sinyavsky are much more informative in their essays and books when evaluating Soviet religious history.⁶² However, the introduction of perestroika changed everything. Despite some restrictions,⁶³ Soviet newspapers such as *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Ogonëk*, *Moskovskie Novosti*, etc., gradually began their critical evaluations of the history of the USSR and church-state interactions. Later, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian authors embarked upon more scholarly investigations and archival studies. Moreover, Russian authors gained access to the archives earlier than did their Western colleagues having, in many cases, what amounts to *ius primae noctis* for the declassified archival material released by officials. Many of them are now starting to reclaim their own history. For example, Valery Alekseev, in his *Иллюзии и догмы* (Illusions and dogmas), has been able to deal with an impressive bulk of archival material on the religious policy of the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ Moreover, Sergei Savelev and Olga Vasileva could be mentioned as Russian scholars who have written critical evaluations on the history

61 For example, see N. P. Nikitin: *Борьба КПСС за ликвидацию фактического неравенства народов СССР. На примере автономных республик Поволжья и Приуралья* (1917–1937. гг.). 1979. Москва. See also I. Y. Trifonov's: *Очерки истории классовой борьбы в СССР в годы НЭПА (1921–1937)*. 1960. Москва and from the same author: *Ликвидация эксплуататорских классов в СССР*. 1975. Москва. During the period of perestroika, certain Soviet authors attempted to publish monographs using more detailed and interesting methods. See N.P. Krasikov: *Социально-этические воззрения русского православия в XX веке*. Издательство Высшая школа. Москва. 1988. For Western evaluations, see Kerst 1977, 17–32.

62 For a classical emigré evaluation of the formation of the Soviet man and his ethics, see Mikhail Geller: *Машина и винтики. История формирования советского человека*. Overseas Publication Interchange Ltd. 1985. London. For a more systematic approach to the history of the USSR, see Mikhail Geller & Aleksandr Nekrich: *Утопия у власти. История Советского Союза с 1917 года до наших дней*. Том. I. Overseas Publication Interchange Ltd. 1982. Frankfurt am Main. See also Andrei Sinyavsky's book on Soviet cultural history, *Soviet Civilization: A Cultural History*. Translated from Russian by Joanne Turnbull with the assistance of Nikolai Formozov, 1990, Arcade Publishing, Inc. New York. See also the well-known estimation on Stalinist state terror by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: *Vankileiriien saaristo (Arkipelag Gulag) 1918–1956: Taiteellinen tutkimuksen kokeilu*. Translated from the Russian by Esa Adrian. 1974. Wahlström & Widstrand. Tukholma. During the 1970s, the topic of this book was so sensitive in Finland that it had to be published in Stockholm, Sweden, and to be imported into Finland.

63 Spring 1987, 27.

64 See V. A. Alekseev: *Иллюзии и догмы*. (Illusions and dogmas) Издательство политической литературы. 1991. Москва.

of the CAP.⁶⁵ There are also some fine articles made by a new generation of Russian scholars such as Mikhail V. Shkarovsky's impressive *"The Russian Orthodox Church versus the State: The Josephite Movement, 1917–1940."*⁶⁶

c. Basic concepts

46 One of the basic terms in this study, the leadership of the Bolshevik party, could be here understood as the closed circle of the Politburo; the Gensec – Stalin and his closest allies, such as V.M. Molotov (Skryabin, 1890–1986), L.M. Kaganovich (1893–1991) or A.A. Zhdanov (1896–1948), etc. This circle of men constituted a "minigovernment" of the Soviet Union. The most important political matters were usually discussed among this elite in private discussions without any protocols – via telephone or via special telegraphs or letters. Stalin was, it goes without saying, the absolute authority among this group and the role of the closed circle around the great Vozhd was to implement his ideas. Together with this inner circle there was an official political government of the country, the Politburo, which in the name of the party's Central Committee was in charge of all political matters in the Soviet Union. This organ included the first echelon of the party and the main state/party functionaries. The leading organ of the Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks) was the party congress, but it convened seldom and it delegated its powers to the Central Committee of the party when it was not convened.

The political initiatives taken by the party leadership or the duties involved in the running of the everyday political agenda were given to the party secretariat or to different state organs such as the VTsIK. It was usually in the interest of these apparatchiki to maintain the functions of the state organs and economic functions of the Soviet

65 See S. N. Savelev: *Бог и комиссары (К истории комиссии по проведению отделения церкви от государства при ЦК ВКП (б) -антирелигиозной комиссии)* – Религия и демократия на пути к свободе совести II. 1993. Москва. See also: O. Yu. Vasileva: *Русская православная церковь и Советская власть в 1917-1927 годах.* – Вопросы Истории. Vol. 8. 1993. Moscow. See also: O. Yu. Vasileva, & P.N. Knyshevsky: *Красные Конкистадоры. "Соратник." 1994.* Москва. See also G.A. Trukan: *Путь к тоталитаризму 1917–1929 г.г.* Российская Академия Наук. Институт Российской Истории. "Наука". 1994. Москва.

66 Slavic Review, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Summer 1995).

state. In this peculiar system of party and state organs, the party organs were always in the dominant position. However, as time went by, most of the state officials were also members of the party. The Soviet system was based on a principle that the state was subordinated to the Communist Party and that these two were actually fused together. Yet, there is a particular distinction between the party and the state. It was the Bolshevik party that originally dominated the Soviet state and mobilized the state organs in order to conduct the "right" communist policy. The history of this dual system of power originates from the annals of the October Revolution from the time when the Bolsheviks conquered the old state bureaucracy. As a rule, the party functionaries always dictated the decisions made by state organs. In this "party-state" fusion, the communist oligarchy exercised its will by means of a new tool, the state. However, this system worked well when the state officials were mostly non-Bolsheviks. Gradually, in the 1920s the number of communist state officials was increasing and the difference between the mobilizing party and the executing state organs was becoming more and more hypothetical. Especially, after the emergence of Stalinism the role of the party was diminishing; the real source of power was then the Stalinist administration.⁶⁷

The second echelon of the party, the party apparatchiki and ideologists, had a duty to comply with the orders and directives coming from the top. The party ideologists were dutybound to explain and clarify the given political line to the Soviet people. On some special occasions, they were summoned to Moscow to have a meeting in order to examine some special questions or simply to take care that the "general line" of the party was understood properly. Moreover, this study will also utilize the special term "local officials." We could interpret this term as a complex of communist "lower-middle strata" party and state functionaries working on state and party matters inside the Soviet administration, economy and culture.⁶⁸

One of the problematic concepts of this study is the term "religious policy" (религиозная политика, церковная политика). Here this term is understood as meaning the policy of the ruling body in its relations to existing churches and religious organizations.⁶⁹ Moreover,

67 Service 1979, 221–222; Rigby 1979, 176–179; Pipes 1980, 243–246; Little 1989, 91, 129–130.

68 See Bonell 1989, 131–132; Orlovsky 1989, 180–182; Suny 1989, 232–235.

69 For the Soviet interpretation of church-state relations, see BSE 1934, 186–188.

the ruling communist regime itself used this term to describe its tactical and strategic objectives in its relations to different religious organizations.⁷⁰

Another term, that of "ideology", is also introduced in the present study in relation to party ideologists, i.e. the apparatchiki responsible for explaining the initiatives of the party leadership to the Soviet public. The term "ideology" was first used by A.L.C. Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836) in the French Revolution to describe the official Republican doctrine of education, which was to rationalize all citizens and free them from prejudices and superstitions. The Russian Bolshevik regime saw its own ideology in the same way; as a body of political program on the way to happiness and a terrestrial Paradise Lost. Moreover, all political questions were interpreted and discussed in ideological terms. For the communist regime, ideology was a method for the analysis of social questions and a tool of policy-making inside the Soviet leadership.⁷¹

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The wisdom of Soviet political thought was interpreted by the leadership of the party, and its greatest interpreter was the great Gensec himself. Under his guidance, there existed an army of party ideologists who worked out the exegesis of the great leader and served as mouthpieces for these party-line interpretations. These ideologists quoted from the texts of Lenin and Stalin as a font of Soviet Bolshevik wisdom just as religious fundamentalists utilize Biblical verses in their sermons.⁷² The prevailing truth on all matters, such as e.g., Soviet

See also Anderson 1991, 700-701.

70 See RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 3, d. 318.

71 Gill 1990, 107. The ingredients of the Bolshevik ideology derive, to some extent, from Russian religious thinking. Especially the ideas of *millenarianism* and *chiliasm*, together with Russian religious and revolutionary messianism, are present here. In the Bolshevik ideology, the expectation of an immediate millenium could offer an absolute solution to earthly problems. According to Vatro Murvar, the religious roots of the Bolshevik ideology can be seen in "the twain cosmogony" that divides humanity into "children of light and darkness." Murvar 1971, 283. Murvar, as do many other observers, distinguishes the eschatological feature of the Bolshevik ideology. According to Murvar, "by means of this eschatological vision", the Bolshevik regime was supposed to establish a perfect social order on Earth. Murvar 1971, 306–307.

72 Sabine 1966, 806–808; Peris 1991, 718. According to Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, Soviet Communism was indeed a form of secular religion "...bearing many institutional and doctrinal similarities to Christianity..." This attitude, despite its extremely correct interpretations of and insight into this movement, sees Soviet Communism as a heretic, erroneous and perverted form of Christianity – as a kind of prodigal son of true religion. However, this kind of approach is problematic

religious policy, was then proclaimed by the party newspapers as the word of infallible truth. The principle of this peculiar system was clear; ideological wisdom was always concentrated in the higher leadership of the party and the lower organs always had the role of adopting the existing truth. However, this and the accumulation of power led to extreme stiffness and dogmatism in Soviet ideology. As Frederick Copleston has remarked in his majestic "A History of Philosophy..."

"...It is therefore appropriate to point out that the transformation of this philosophy into dogmatic creed of a powerful Party has arrested the natural development of the different lines of thought to which its diverse aspects might be expected to have given rise."⁷³

The afore-mentioned dogmatic preception of the ruling ideology was perhaps one cause that gave rise to many problems when the central leading communist institutions were facing the "otherness" of tricky ideological enemies, such as religion. It was also perhaps one reason for the inconsistency of the religious policy of the Cult Commission. The rigid and dogmatic ideology of the party could not offer any clear solution and the members of this commission had to read the lips of the "great" Gensec when they wanted to follow the "true" ideology in Soviet religious policy. As we shall see, depending on the changing political situations, the CSCRQ in Moscow was obliged to be the διάβολος and the guardian angel of the religious organizations; to be a commission for looting and protection almost simultaneously.⁷⁴

to historians. See Arthur Jay Klinghoffer: *Red Apocalypse. The Religious Evolution of Soviet Communism*. University of America, Inc. Lanham. New York. 1996.

73 Copleston 1985, 333.

74 See also Besançon 1981, 2-5; Lane 1981, 40-41; Bercken 1989, 16-21.

II The great leap and hasty retreat – the years of the formation and early activities of the CSCRQ (1929–1932)

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1. General background and the formal structure of the CSCRQ

Soviet religious policy during the early 1930s might be characterized as a period of a "frontal attack."¹ The semiofficial tolerance between religious organizations and the Soviet regime, which flourished during the high NEP, was nearing its end in 1928. The party's slogan "face to the countryside" was replaced by a new policy, which became known as "face to collectivization." Consequently, the relatively moderate stance in religious policy from 1923 to 1927 was now revised under the slogan of "the Storming of Heaven." The commencement of this post-NEP assault against religion and other enemies of socialism, such as e.g., nationalism, goes back to the 15th party congress in December 1927. During this congress, the Soviet leadership seemed to act unanimously within the constraint of the NEP policy. However, in 1928 Stalin was already moving against his former allies (Bukharin, etc.) and the more conciliatory policy they represented. The first battlefield was the Russian countryside in Autumn 1928 where the Stalinist volunteers and apparatchiks began

1 Fainsod 1958, 434.

their first strikes against the fragile civil peace of the NEP. After this prologue, the destruction of the traditional Russian peasant society was gradually implemented in two stages, the first stage (Autumn 1928 - February 1930) having started with the de-kulakization of the Russian countryside. During this phase, the Soviet regime attempted to root out the resistance of the peasantry by persecuting the kulaks, along with their "hirelings", i.e. priests, mullahs, etc. After the second stage (summer 1930–1932), the fate of the peasantry was finally sealed and the independent farmers were turned into a mass of kolkhozniki.²

The "original sin" of the traditional local village priest or mullah was that they constituted a possible threat as potential organizers of peasant resistance against the Stalinist regime.³ The security apparatus was seeking out potential enemies of the communist state and the servants of religious cults were much too suitable victims to be overlooked. It was not surprising, that at the same time as the famous show trial against technical experts in May-July 1928 was taking place (the so-called Shakhty case) the GPU was also "discovering" numerous religious or "ecclesiastical-royalist" centres in Vyatka, Smolensk, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Astrakhan, Leningrad, etc. Later, these "centres" were revealed to the Soviet public in the party newspapers, understandably enough, in order to increase mass hysteria among the population.⁴

The reason for this paranoid witch hunt was the Stalinist concept

2 Concerning the pace and the various stages of collectivization, see Davies 1980, 93, 96, 234–236, 404–412; Ward 1993, 40–44. See also Curtiss 1953, 196, 235–237; Conquest 1986, 20–24, 71–72, 83, 101, 112–113; Slatter 1990, 274–275. See also the latest evaluations of the relations between religion, the Russian peasantry and the Bolshevik Revolution, Figes 1996, 745.

3 Lewin 1985, 107.

4 For some of these "revelations", see Pravda, 12 September 1929, No. 210 (4344) "Вылазки классового врага": Pravda, 15 September 1929, No. 213 (4347) "Ликвидация контрреволюционной организации": Pravda, 2 October 1929, No. 227 (4361) "Шайка священников-контрреволюционеров": Pravda, 8 October 1929, No. 232 (4366) "Раскрыта контрреволюционная организация церковников": Pravda, 13 October 1929, No. 237 (4371) "Раскрыта организация церковников-монархистов": Pravda, 25 October 1929, No. 247 (4381) "На Сев. Кавказе ликвидирована монархическая организация": Pravda, 27 October 1929, No. 249 (4383) "Дело о поповско-кулацком выступлении": Izvestiya, 24 November 1929, No. 274(3810) "Усилим борьбу на антирелигиозном фронте." See also Vihavainen 1980, 151–152. On the Shakhty case, see RTsKhIDNI f.17, op.3, d.677 (Pp 15, 15/3–28); SS 11, 35, 53–63. "О работах апрельского объединённого пленума ЦК и ЦКК." See also Avtorkhanov 1959, 28–30.

of class war, which required imaginary "enemies" in order to justify the harsh methods employed during collectivization. Robert Tucker's interpretation would seem to be pertinent here: Stalin also had his psychological motivations to exercise "merciless Leninist politics" against supposed class enemies. As Tucker has remarked, Stalin, in his attempt to demonstrate that he was a new Lenin, tried to imitate the "harsh" Leninist technique of policy-making.⁵

According to this psychological motivation, kulaks, priests or mullahs were suitable scapegoats during the raids of the local Soviet volunteers who introduced collectivization in the Russian countryside. Moreover, a new fierce antireligious demagogy was also needed to motivate the masses. Imaginary enemies, such as the "conspiring kulak" and his "ideological ally" – priest or mullah, were frequently utilized in Soviet newspapers as archetypal enemies. The lists of enemies were lengthy: foes such as "нэпман, вредитель, бюрократ, мракобес, антисоветский элемент"⁶ were lurking everywhere. Initially these images were cultivated by "leftist" party cadres such as L.S. Sosnovsky (1886–1937) and K.B. Radek (Sobelson, 1885–1939), who in 1927–1928 had demonstrated their dissatisfaction over the civil peace of NEP.⁷ Later, the Stalinist propaganda machine adopted such slogans and utilized them skilfully for its own purposes. According to this propaganda, the priest was, together with the kulak, a leading obstacle to the advancement of socialism in the Soviet Union. The

5 Tucker 1990, 44–45, 70–72, 162–166, 221.

6 Shinkarchuk 1995, 49.

7 On Leftist writings, see AT II, 54–55. The intraparty struggle was connected with antireligious activity in many ways. Those who were out of favor usually had to face charges that they had been supporting religion or religious organizations. For some examples, see Pravda, 3 September 1929, No. 202 (4336) "Сумерки богов и ...оппортунистов." Before the elections of the soviets, the Central Committee warned party officials concerning the assumed alliance of the kulaks, sectarians and "ecclesiasticals", who were actually helping "illegal Trotskyite groups" and "counter-revolutionary organizations of the Menshevik-type." Pravda, 1 January 1929, No. 1 (4135) "О перевыборах советов. Всем ЦК нацкомпартий, крайкомам, обкомам, губкомам." However, according to usual allegations, the kulaks were allied with priests and "ecclesiasticals." "...кулачество выступает единым фронтом с попами, церковниками, баптистами, со всеми обломками разбитого Октябрьской революцией капитализма." Pravda, 1 January 1929, No. 1 (4135). "Пролетарский город на помощь деревне." See also Pravda, 8 January 1929, No. 6 (4140) "Подкулачники пробрались в советы." For an article dedicated to the struggle against the alliance of kulak and priest, see Pravda, 11 January 1929, No. 9, (4143). "Крепче ударим по кулаку и церковнику". "Церковники – активные помощники кулака."



"Against ecclesiastics – agents of world bourgeoisie." "A spontaneous" meeting of Soviet workers in 1930 protesting against believers and their supporters. Source: KN 1930, No. 10.

Soviet newspapers again and again "realized" that religion, churches or sectarians were disturbing the Soviet push for a new socialist society. *Summa summarum*, class enemies, such as religious organizations and their servants were to be blamed for the difficulties that arose during Stalin's war against his own people.

At the beginning of these aggressive antireligious attacks, the Soviet regime suddenly re-organized its religious policy. The earlier antireligious commission of the ruling party, the CAP, was reshaped on 13 July 1928 and eventually dissolved in November 1929⁸, and the following year the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (VTsIK) on 8 April 1929 (in addition to adopting new legislation concerning religious organizations) decided to create a new permanent commission (CSCRQ), which would deal with questions concerning the religious cults.⁹

8 In 1922–1928 it was officially known as "Комиссия по проведению отделения церкви от государства при ЦК РКП (б)" and on 13 July 1928, it was renamed "Антирелигиозная комиссия при Политбюро ЦК ВКП (б)."

9 GARF f. 1235, op. 43, d. 67, l. 311–313. See also Savelev 1993, 164. The adoption of this new legislation on 8 April 1929 and the birth of the Cult Commission was

One might say that with this resolution, the Soviet regime made a "giant leap" in its religious policy. In an official sense, this could be understood as a way of normalizing religious political decision-making in the Soviet Union; it was no longer the party but the "neutral" state that exercised control in Soviet religious policy. Various explanations for this change have been put forward by several scholars. Some Western studies have commented on this reorganization of the religious policy in the context of the general development in Soviet policy-making. According to Anderson, the supervision of religious life was "afterwards" put in to the hands of the 8th Department of the Justice Commissariat. Furthermore, he mentions that this Department was later liquidated, its functions being transferred to a Secretariat for Religious Affairs attached to the Central Executive Committee, VTsIK. He also mentions that in 1930 this organ was renamed as the Permanent Commission for Religious Affairs under the auspices of Sovnarkom. Anderson believes that this was part of the general transfer of power inside Soviet society. It was a "symbolic reflection of the general shift of power from the legislative to the executive branch of government."¹⁰ On the other hand, Luchterhand comments that the permanent commission was elevated to a collegially composed "Central Standing Commission" in 1931 under the leadership of Smidovich. According to Luchterhand, this organ was united in 1934 with the OGPU.¹¹

These "pre-archival" interpretations are more or less correct in the

not a coincidence. The same people who had been responsible for planning the new legislation on religious organizations were later to be members of the CSCRCQ. Among those people there were antireligious experts such as Krasikov and Smidovich. As an interesting detail, M.V. Galkin (Gorev) was not included on the new commission, although he had been planning the new legislation. Perhaps his earlier close cooperation with Trotsky had discredited him in the eyes of the Stalinist leadership. Moreover, it seems that among these creators of the new more aggressive legislation, there prevailed a strong conviction that religion could be exterminated once and for all by legislative means. See GARF f. 1235, op. 73, d. 1649, rol.1, l. 3-4. See also how these architects of the new legislation rejected the idea that the Soviet population should possess any "religious needs." See GARF f. 1235, op. 73, d. 1649, rol. 2, л. 79. "Протокол Заседания Комиссии, образованной постановлением Президиума ВЦИК 25 марта 1929 г. для отредактирования проекта постановления о религиозных объединениях 30 марта 1929 года. Замечания к проекту постановления о религиозных объединениях."

10 Anderson 1991, 690.

11 Luchterhand 1993, 56-57.

sense that the role of the party was actually diminishing in the 1930s. According to the conventional explanation usually put forward in Soviet studies, the burden of policy-making was shifting in the early 1930s to the administrative hands of the Soviet regime. The main reason for this change was, of course, related to the stabilization of the power struggle inside the party. By 1929, the intraparty struggle was nearly over. Stalin accomplished his political victory by shifting the power from the Bolshevik party to his own administration. The so-called "party-state" structure really only began to materialize in the Soviet Union at this time. After the fusion of the leading Bolshevik elite and the bureaucracy, more and more matters began to be concentrated in the hands of the Stalinist inner-circles. As mentioned already, the General Secretary was the mastermind behind this development; instead of hot-headed theorizers, Stalin favoured men with administrative skills. This move to administrative methods also took place in Soviet religious policy; the leadership of the Soviet religious policy was put under state supervision, under obedient Stalinist *nomenklatura*.¹²

However, if one examines in greater detail the explanations for the emergence of this new commission, one comes to the conclusion that this rapid switch of responsibilities in the Soviet religious policy reflected a fundamental change in the strategy of "class struggle." As Stalin and his apparatus had chosen to ruin the *smychka*, there was no room for a civil peace with the peasantry and its traditional values. In this new situation, religious associations were suitable scapegoats in this new "civil war" and victims of Stalinist terror. Consequently, there was no need to conduct any real discussions inside the party, in contrast to the NEP period. In fact, the contradiction between the NEP period and the Cultural Revolution is quite striking; at the height of the "high NEP", the Soviet regime even organized a secret meeting in 1927 in order to discuss religious political matters.¹³ Moreover, the CAP had even stuck to democratic principles; e.g., during its meetings it allowed voting. The party officials inside the commission could be characterized as being divided between hardliners and moderates – between "culturalists" and "interventionists."

After 1929, Soviet religious policy was conducted in a different

12 Rupnik 1988, 132. See also Rigby 1979, 176–179.

13 See the protocols of this meeting: RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op, 60, d. 791–792. Also see Luukkanen 1994, 200–202.

style. As a certain Russian commentator, S.N. Savelev, emphasized in an article *"God and Commissars"*, there was no need to support any "democratic" commission when the Politburo in its extraordinary meeting on 19 November 1929 decided to consider all religions as "legally functioning counter-revolutionary forces" inside the USSR.¹⁴ Consequently, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, the ruling party did not want to pursue any kind of "normal" religious policy; at the beginning of the 1930s, the general attitude towards religion was, now or never.

However, the actual declaration of war against all religious organizations inside the USSR took place on 30 January 1930 during a special meeting of the Politburo. At this meeting, the Politburo approved instructions for extraordinary measures to be taken to liquidate the kulaks, i.e., rich peasants as a class. According to the above decision, the wealthy Russian peasant population should be divided into 3 categories. The people in the first two categories were supposed to be dealt with by the NKVD; the first category of 60 000 people should be expelled to concentration camps as "counter-revolutionary kulak activists." The second category of the wealthy peasantry comprising some 150 000 people should be forced to move

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14 Savelev 1993, 177–178. Although the author of the present monograph has examined the protocols of the Politburo and even the so-called "special sheets" of the protocols, no such decision extant dated 19 November, 1929 has turned up. See RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 3, d. 765. However, there seems to be no reason to doubt the information given by Savelev; actually, there is a strange gap in the information in these protocols suggesting that these protocols were fixed later. However, according to IRPTs this decision was done in the beginning of 1929, see IRPTs, 91. Nevertheless, during 1929, the Politburo was busy accepting new regulations governing antireligious activity. For example, the Politburo had accepted the texts used in the parades on the 12th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1929. Among them were also antireligious slogans such as: "За рясой скрывается классовый враг. Церковники и сектанты – агенты кулаков и нэпманов. Подыдем массы на борьбу с религиозным обманом." RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 3, d. 765, l. 24 (Pp 106, 5/11–29). As early as January 1929, the Politburo had accepted the program for strengthening antireligious work. According to the Politburo, religious organizations were taking advantage of the internal difficulties in constructing a socialist society. RTsKhIDNI f.17, op.3, d.723 (Pp 61, 24/1–29); RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op. 4, d. 122 "Постановление Политбюро ЦК ВКП (б). Проект."; 89/4/27 "Статья "Правильно организовать борьбу с религией" (из доклада на Сокольнической райпартконференции в Москве). Машинописный текст с правками неизвестного." See also GARF f.5407, op.1, d.17 (Начиная с листа 263). "Акционерному издательскому обществу Безбожников. II/VI/1928 г." See also Lewin 1985, 97–100; Peris 1991, 772.

to distant areas inside the Soviet Union. This notorious document also reveals that the Soviet rulers were extremely cautious concerning the possible consequences of this action; in its orders, the Politburo stressed that in case of any resistance the Soviet security forces should mete out punishment by "применением высшей меры репрессии" - "the highest measure of repression" (a Soviet euphemism for capital punishment). In its decision, the Politburo demonstrated its concern over the fact that the religious organizations, religious soviets or sectarian organizations could become bastions of kulak or lishentsy resistance. Therefore this Politburo decision recommended that the Orgburo should organize a massive closure of churches and a fight against religion inside the Soviet governmental apparatus.¹⁵

The actual strategic planning in this "war" against the religious organizations was carried-out by the Politburo itself, but it needed other organs, such as the newly created CSCRQ to implement its strategic objectives in religious policy. However, bearing in mind the Stalinist methods of policy-making, it is obvious that the actual role of the CSCRQ was to be a mere auxiliary organ (like the *Bezbozhnik*-organization) striving for the official "Great Goal" of a totally atheist Soviet society.¹⁶

Actually, the paradox of the religious policy of the 1930s lay in the fact that although the Soviet regime had declared its animosity towards all religious organizations, it was nonetheless obliged to

15 "...Срочно пересмотреть законодательство о религиозных объединениях в духе полного исключения какой бы то ни было возможности превращения руководства органов этих объединений (церковные советы, сектанские общины, и пр.) в опорные пункты кулачества, лишенчества и вообще антисоветских элементов. Поручить Оргбюро ВК дать директиву по вопросу о закрытии церквей, молитвенных домов сектантов и проч. и о борьбе с религиозным и сектантским движением в целях устранения тормозов в соваппарате, мешающих проведению в жизнь принятых подавляющей массой крестьянства решений о закрытии церквей, молитвенных домов сектантов и т.п. В этой директиве указать также на необходимость особо осторожного проведения этих мероприятий в отсталых национальных районах..." RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 162, d. 8 "Решения Политбюро от 30.1.30г. Особая папка. О мероприятиях по ликвидации кулацких хозяйств в районах сплошной коллективизации. Утверждено Политбюро ЦК ВКП б) 30.1.30г. Строго секретно." See also Radzinsky 1997, 263–264.

16 One striking example concerning the rooting out of the old relics and history was the piece of Soviet legislation which changed the name of the town "Bogorodsk" (Theotokos) to "Noginsk" (after a certain Bolshevik leader – V.P. Nogin). See SZR, No. 18, 31 March, 1930.

acknowledge the persistence of religion. We may put forward three different explanations for this puzzle. First, although the "interventionists" had gained the upper hand during the Cultural Revolution, the Stalinist regime gradually started to distance itself from the demands of the most ardent "interventionists." From the beginning of the 1930s, the most notable radicals and ardent enthusiasts soon realized that they were out of favour. Stalin did not need them any more to stabilize Soviet society. Instead, he resorted to the Russian past and its autocratic traditions. This change was part of Stalin's own policy of advocating Russian national roots and the Great-Russian tradition, including the ROC. But it must be stressed that this new modification was, of course, realized strictly under Stalinist conditions. Atheism consistently remained a part of official Soviet dogma and all religions were relegated to the margins of Soviet society. Moreover, the ROC or any other religious organizations for that matter, had no guarantees against the Stalinist terror or other coercive methods of the administration.

The second reason for the gradual stabilization of relations between the state and the ROC was, paradoxically enough, Moscow's desire to follow a coordinated and disciplined religious policy. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Stalinist leadership ever lost its ideological grip or was pursuing any kind of "concordia" with the ROC. The simple explanation for this was a fear of anarchy and a desire to create a unified model for the Soviet religious policy.

Why then was the Soviet state apparatus so anxious to take command of Soviet religious policy? The most likely explanation was its desire to restrict the excessive "revolutionary" moods of local apparatchiks. From the corridors of the Kremlin, these independent atheistic campaigns seemed to be a suspicious phenomenon containing uncontrollable elements of anarchy – a spontaneous "stikhiinost" of the masses.

These hypotheses can also be verified from archival sources: according to the protocols of the CSCRQ, this commission had hardly any control over the situation in the periphery of the country, especially at the beginning of the 1930s.¹⁷ The wave of petitions,

17 For example, in 1929-1931 officials in Leningrad received only a few formal instructions from the center. See these instructions: TsGA SPb f. 1000, op. 49, d. 33 ll. 94-95 "Центральным исполнительным комитетам автономных республик, краевым и областным исполнительным комитетам"; TsGA SPb

Table II.1. Statistical documentation on petitions and complaints on questions related to religious cults during 1924–1934

GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 43.

	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
жалоб	1506	1248	2840	2043	2861	5242
сделано запросов	753	625	1420	1727	2245	5473
ходоков	500	800	616	525	946	1800
	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	
жалоб	17637	12350	6355	4808	8229	
сделано запросов	14110	6387	3846	3114	3645	
ходоков	6029	3219	1719	1094	1601	

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appeals and protests to the VTsIK presidium and to Kalinin himself during the 1930s is the best evidence of this "anarchy." Observing the number of petitions to the higher Soviet organs (see Table II.1), we see that in 1924 Soviet officials received 1506 complaints and considered 753 of them. The following year, during the height of the NEP, the total number of complaints decreased to 1248. During the peaceful period of the NEP, the total amount of complaints delivered to the central organs remained relatively small, up until 1929. The peak in the number of complaints coincided with the height of collectivization in 1930 and then gradually decreased in 1931–1933. The next peak occurred in 1934, when the VTsIK received 8229 complaints.¹⁸

Moreover, only after the formative years of 1929–33 did the Cult Commission succeed in establishing more stable links with the provinces. Only after the Cultural Revolution was this commission able to resume its official duties; and even then it could only

f. 1000, op. 48, d. 77, ll. 194 "Выписка из протокола No. 9 ВЦИК от 30/V -1931 г."

18 See GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 43. "Цифровые сведения о жалобах и переписке, поступившей по вопросам, связанным с культурами за 1924-1934 гг."

concentrate its main energy on counseling local officials who were guilty of excesses. The one significant explanation for this "weakness" was the commission's lack of actual power; in the midst of the Soviet Cultural Revolution, it had very few means to exercise its extensive powers. As a matter of fact, there was a striking contradiction between the official extensive responsibilities of the new commission and the modest role it exercised in practice.

Finally, the third reason was that the Soviet regime was highly interested in preserving the façades of a "neutral religious policy" being conducted in the country. In the foreign press it always denied charges of religious persecution. Although in general the Soviet state appeared to be quite invulnerable when facing international pressure, nonetheless on a few occasions, as we may see later, foreign pressure actually had a clear impact on Soviet religious-political practices.

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2. The contradiction between mandate and practice

According to its original mandate, the Cult Commission was meant to be the highest organ of Soviet religious policy. It was supposed to dictate and control the life of the religious cults by legislative norms.¹⁹ The leadership of this commission was confirmed on the highest level. Moreover, it was put under the personal chairmanship of one of the members of the Presidium of the VTsIK. According to the official rules, other members of this commission also had formidable positions inside the ruling party: the Cult Commission consisted of people from various departments of the Central Committee of the Party, a representative from the Highest Court of the Soviet Union, a delegate from the NKYust of the RSFSR, and one from the Moscow City Soviet. Furthermore, the commission was supposed to have extensive links to local party and state organs. On paper, everything seemed to be in order. According to its mandate, the Cult Commission was supposed to organize relations with local state organs such as the Commissariats of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Enlightenment, Military Affairs, Agriculture, Social Security, Finances, and the Commissariat

19 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 11. "Положение постоянной центральной и местных комиссий по рассмотрению вопросов культа."

of Communications (the NKYust, NKID, Narkompros, NKVoenoi, NKZem, NKSobez, NKF and NKPut). The position of this commission was further consolidated later. The Presidium of the VTsIK reinforced the mandate of the Cult Commission by issuing more precise directions to guide Soviet religious policy. According to these new directives, the committee had a general leadership role to play and was supposed to supervise the party's and government's acts concerning religious cults in the RSFSR. After afore mentioned introduction, the VTsIK gave more precise orders. First, the new Cult Commission should resolve all questions which were of a "religious character." The remaining paragraphs specified more practical duties, such as the right to decide the closure of prayer houses – which later proved to be one of the most significant tasks of this commission.²⁰

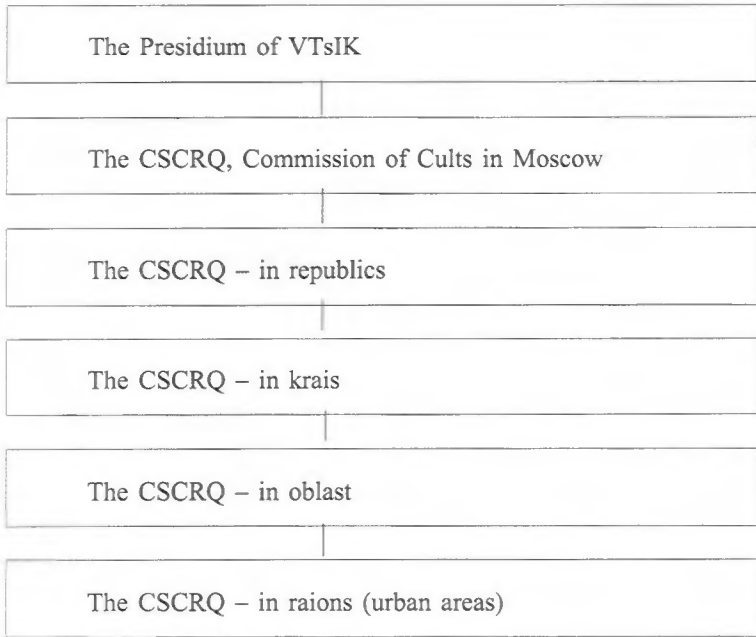
Moreover, from the start the actual work of this new commission proved an uphill struggle. At the very first meeting of the Cult Commission, which took place on 6 June 1929, only 5 people attended; among them were Petr Germogenovich Smidovich (1874–1935), from the Commissariat of Justice, (as chairman); Bogomolov, V.N. Yakovleva (1884–1941), from the Commissariat of Internal Affairs; Ikryanistova, from the Commissariat of Labor; and N.P. Orleansky, who acted as secretary. As the protocols of this first commission reveal, representatives from the All-Union Central Council of Professional Unions (VTsSPS) and the Soviet secret police (OGPU) did not even bother to show up.²¹

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this commission had difficulties in establishing links with the peripheral areas of the country. The Cult Commission in Moscow had to establish its network on four levels inside the Soviet administration: in the republics, krajs, oblasts and at the grass-roots level, i.e., raions (see Table II.2). It is clear that the year 1929 represents a watershed with regards to petitions and complaints received by the government. The new activity of the CSCRQ is also apparent; during 1929 the number of resolved matters is higher than the number of complaints reaching Soviet officials.

20 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 11 "Положение постоянной центральной и местных комиссий по рассмотрению вопросов культа."

21 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 5 (pkvk 1, 4/6 1929). The outcome of the second meeting verifies one of the main functions of this new commission; it had the duty of supervising the economic activity of the religious organizations. GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 5 (pkvk 2, 24/9 1929). See also GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 5 (pkvk 3, 31/12 1929).

Table II.2 The organizational structure of the Cult Commission, CSCSRQ



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Moreover, the years 1932–33 represent an obvious sign of the "good years" of the 1930s.

The basic units of the local CSCSRQ commissions worked under a local ispolkom and were chaired by member of its presidium. The practical implementation was usually, as M. Shkarovsky reveals, rather confusing.²² For example, the local CSCSRQ commission in the Leningrad oblast started its work as late as 17 October 1930 under the formal guidance of the local oblast ispolkom – Lenoblispolkom. This commission was chaired by its secretary, a certain Lomtev, who

22 Shkarovsky 1995, 148–149.

actually worked there as its nominal leader. The actual leader of this commission was a party secretary whose primary position was in the city's administrative unit (Admnadzor). This grass-roots commission also had other members, such as a representative from the oblast procuracy, from the local Trade-Union (Oblprofsovet), the local Committee of the Oblast (the Obkom VKP(b), from the local Narkompros, and from the OGPU.²³

As the Leningrad case indicates, the grass-roots work of this commission was done within the framework of the individual raions with special "inspectors of cults" responsible for obtaining information and purposes of surveillance. Apart from the responsibility of reporting to their superiors, these inspectors were expected to act as messengers between the local Cult Commissions and parishes, *dvadtsatki*. In many cases, this strange relationship was to end with the liquidation of the individual parish under the leadership of the local cult-inspector. However, it was not surprising that there were many pitfalls and problems. As one of the routine reports from the Leningrad area reveals, the inspectors seldom had any special training whatsoever for their work and often had another full-time job in some other area of the Soviet administration.²⁴ As we may read between the lines of the report of a certain inspector, Filippova, these inspectors were in danger of developing a strange "affectionate" relationship with the parishes they were supervising. Moreover, in this report, Filippova complained to colleagues that she had received very little actual help from the local raisovet's presidium and on many occasions was compelled to follow contradictory instructions when dealing with religious organizations.²⁵

The real work of the central commission of the Cult Commission in Moscow did not start until 1930, simultaneously with the first efforts at collectivization and the systematic assault against religious organizations by the Soviet state. While earlier antireligious campaigns during the NEP seemed to be rather sporadic and were

23 TsGA SPb f. 1000, op. 48, d. 77, ll. 194–195. According to Shkarovsky, the influence of the GPU's ecclesiastical subsection was increasing with this new reshaping of the Soviet religious policy administration and the purpose of these new organs was to liquidate religion in the Soviet Union. Shkarovsky 1995, 149.

24 See TsGA SPb f. 1000, op.48, d.77, ll. 188–189 "Протокол No. 4. Совещания инспекторов культов г. Ленинграда от 27/XI-31 г."

25 TsGA SPb f. 1000, op. 48, d. 77, l. 115 "Протокол совещания с инспекторами г. Ленинграда от 15/VII -32 г."

limited to some practical goal (such as the confiscation of valuable items from churches in the years 1921–1922), this offensive proved to be more serious. This change of course in the early 1930s, with its extreme ideological fervour, was an outcome of the Cultural Revolution. The frontal attack against religion reflected the hostile mood of "interventionist" propaganda presented by the II Congress of the Godless movement in June 1929. This Congress resulted in neither the "interventionists" nor the "culturalists" gaining the upper hand. However, for a short time, the "interventionists" appeared to be victorious.²⁶

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At that time the Soviet atheist movement played a crucial role as the mouthpiece of the militant antireligiozniki. This society was one of the willing auxiliary organs working for the Stalinist Cultural Revolution. At the peak of the Cultural Revolution, it held a powerful position in Soviet society. In its official programmes and newspapers, it openly circulated propaganda for supporting Stalinist political objectives, such as collectivization, and was eager to assist in achieving those goals.²⁷ Moreover, the League was the first to introduce practical measures in the antireligious fight.

First, the SVB was actively canvassing for the closure of churches on a massive scale. Second, the League was eager to organize *ex*

26 VIII, 558–559. "Примечания."

27 GARF f.5407, op.1, d.41. "Об участии организации СВБ в весенней производственной и сельско-хозяйственной кампании. Сов.Секретно": "Инструкция по организации и работе сельской ячейки союза воинствующих безбожников": "Совхозцентр и центральный совет союза воинствующих безбожников в СССР - всем совхозтрестам и совхозам": "всем центрам и союзам с/х кооперации": "Проект. Резолюция совещания редакторов деревенских журналов и газет, издающихся в Москве, состоявшегося 18 ноября 1929 года при деревенском отделе ВС СВБ. СССР." See also KPSSvr IV, 321; GARF f.5407, op.1, d.41 "Проект. - Всем республикам, краевым и областным советам СВБ. Об антирелигиозной работе среди батрачества и бедноты.": "Всем республиканским, краевым, областным и губернским советам СВБ. Об участии ячеек СВБ в проведении праздника "день урожая" 23. мая 1929." On the evaluation of Pravda concerning the Godless-congress of 1929, see "Второй съезд безбожников своими постановлениями и решениями дал основу для развертывания безбожной работы широким фронтом и именно в духе и направлении, нами указанном, т.-е. что борьба с религией должна вестись на основе самого энергичного и инициативного участия безбожных организаций на всех участках социалистического строительства, подходя к конкретным задачам на каждом из них под особым, специфическим углом." See also Pravda, 7 September, 1929, No. 206 (4340) "За массовую работу союза безбожников."

officio the drop-outs among the clergy, i.e. those priests and monks who were willing to give up religion and their ecclesiastical vocation. Third, it was among the first institutions to suggest removing and confiscating church bells. Finally, it was 100 per cent ready to assist in Stalin's policy of collectivization and backed his exhortations to refuse former enemies of the people readmission to kolkhozes. The League interpreted this as a refusal to admit priests and sectarians into kolkhozes (thus making their existence illegal in Soviet society).²⁸

It is not surprising that the Godless movement was thrilled with the new law of 8 April 1929, which delivered a devastating blow to religious organizations in the USSR. According to this legislation (§ 4), before undertaking any activities, religious societies were obliged to register officially. Nevertheless, the most important consequence of this law was that it forbade religious organizations from undertaking any social services (§ 17) and restricted religious activities to the confines of church buildings and to church services. Moreover, on 22 May 1929 the Soviet Constitution was amended by the Congress of the XIV All-Russian Congress of Soviets (VTsIK). The existing right to conduct religious propaganda was abolished and the amended Constitution only acknowledged "liberty of confession" for Soviet citizens. The new legislation adopted in 1929 revealed the bull's-eye at which the ruling regime was now aiming its policy. When the Politburo on the 19th of November 1929 decided that all religions were "legally functioning counter-revolutionary forces" inside the USSR, it only confirmed the strategic target of the Soviet "hawks" in relation to religion. The main goal was to liquidate religion once and for all.²⁹

28 GARF f.5407, op.1, d.41. "Тезисы доклада "Ликвидация кулачества и борьба с религией."

29 RPTsKG, 250–261; SURb, 474–483; SURc, No. 33, 458; SURc, No. 35, 474–483; SURc, No. 5, 733; SURc, No. 18, 261–263. See also GARF f.353, op.10, d.17 "Объяснительная записка к проекту постановления Всероссийского Съезда Советов о внесении изменений и дополнений в Конституцию РСФСР: SSR, 400 ("...свобода религиозных исповеданий и антирелигиозной пропаганды признается за всеми гражданами."); VSS XIV (Z13), 45. See also Simon 1974, 64–67; Alexeev, 1979, 29–30; Conquest 1986, 202–203; Bessmertnyi-Anzimirov 1990, 37–41. See also the comments of Mr. Shafarevich on the legislation of 1929, Shafarevich 1973, 10–13, 18–22, 39–40. According to a Politburo decision concerning the festivals of the 12th anniversary of the October Revolution, the demonstrators were obliged to pay heed to antireligious slogans such as: "за ярсой скрывается классовый враг. Церковники и сектанты – агенты кулаков и эппманов. Подыдем массы

As mentioned already, the Stalinist concept of decision-making required that the new Cult Commission should be not so much a discussing board but a department which could assist in putting into effect this final solution in the "liquidation of religions." However, en route to this atheist society, it had more practical duties. Consequently, when examining the primary sources of this organ, we can detect a tactical "three-step programme" on the way to the final solution. First, as the decisions of the Cult Commission show, the ruling regime wanted to exploit the religious organizations financially. Along with extensive taxation and burdensome insurance fees imposed on churches and servants of cults, the Communist power also wanted to expropriate from the churches and religious premises everything of any value, i.e., the metal of church bells, crosses, icons, etc. Second, after stripping the religious organizations of all possible resources, the communist regime introduced the systematic liquidation of churches. Third, the commission introduced a wave of systematic persecution aimed against all the servants of cults. This can easily be seen from the issues the Cult Commission was dealing with during the peak of the Cultural Revolution. The practical duties of this new "consistory of unbelief" fell into three main categories. First, the confiscation of economic resources; second, the liquidation of parishes, and third, the deportation of the servants of cults to the Gulag.³⁰

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Nevertheless, the seemingly prestigious position of the Cult Commission was only a façade. Actual decisions on the outlines of Soviet religious policy were made by the Stalinist leadership, while the commission was merely obliged to comply with the dictates handed down from above. This is also obvious from the composition of this board: the members of the Cult Commission did not belong

на борьбу с религиозным обманом!" RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 3, d. 765 (Pp 105, 5/11–29).

30 The execution of this unofficial three-step plan has been confirmed also by Merle Fainsod, who has done research in the Smolensk Archives. For example, the closure of the church in the Vyazma okrug, Bukharin raion, was initially pursued by overtaking; then a "check" on church property was launched and an inspection was made "whether the existence of the parish was legal." Fainsod 1958, 435. Even I.S. Prokhanov, the famous leader of the Evangelical Christians observed that during the Cultural Revolution the ruling regime implemented a "three-step program." According to Prokhanov, the Bolshevik party firstly closed down the churches, "закрытие мест для богослужений", eliminating the religious leaders "устранение религиозных руководителей", and depriving them of nourishment "лишение питания." Prokhanov 1992, 247–248.

to the "first echelons" of the party, but were people of secondary importance. Briefly, the commission could only handle technical matters and minor issues. What it definitely could not do was to decide about the general lines of Soviet religious policy. The task of the commission dealt with the technical execution of policy, not with its formulation, despite the fact that the commission had officially obtained a prestigious mandate from the VTsIK.

During the years 1929–1935, the chairman of this commission was P.G. Smidovich. He was an apparatchik who had been a member of the party's special commission working with sects (Orgkomsekt) in the early 1920s, and after the dissolution of the APO's antireligious commission, he was nominated as a member of the special party's religious-political commission, CAP. Another formidable member of the commission was Petr Ananevich Krasikov (Andreevich, 1870–1939), who had worked in the APO's antireligious commission together with Ivan Ivanovich Skvortsov-Stepanov (1870–1928), and also later in the CAP. After the death of Smidovich, the chairmanship of the CSCRQ was transferred to Krasikov, who remained the leader of this organ up until its "liquidation" in 1938. The third significant member of this commission was, the "least" famous of these men, a chekist, Evgeny Aleksandrovich Tuchkov (1892–1957).³¹

Moreover, other prominent members of the party were formal members of this commission. As a *svodka* from 1936 testifies, the Cult Commission included official members such as Commissaar of Health, N.A. Semashko (1874–1949), Yaroslavsky (who actually, according to the protocols, never participated in the meetings of this commission), B.L. Borisov (representative of the Soviet Federal

31 He was born into a peasant family in the province of Ivanovo. He received four years of elementary school education and worked as an unskilled worker in the Ivanovo-Voznesensk district until 1910. He was drafted into the Imperial Army in 1915 and served as a clerk on the Western front. In 1917, he joined the Bolshevik party and from March 1918 to October 1919 led the legal division of the provincial Cheka in Ivanovo-Voznesensk. Before his nomination as a leader of the 6th "ecclesiastical" section of the Cheka from April 1922 to October 1939, he had worked as organizer of the Cheka's "special detachments" and then as departmental head of the provincial Cheka in Ufa. He had also worked inside the CAP and, as a representative of the security apparatus, was in a powerful position when the commission wanted to implement its resolutions or to get information from the provinces. He survived the Great Purges to retire in 1947. See RPTsKG, 290–291. "Ходатайство начальника СПО ОГПУ Я.С. Агранова о награждении Е.А. Тучкова 1 сентября 1931 г." See also Roslof 1994, 90.

procuracy), V.J. Timofeev (NKID), N.J. Martemyanov (VTsSPS), D. Korkmassov (Sovet Natsionalnostei VTsIK), E.F. Muravev (Institute of Philosophy in the Russian Academy of Sciences), and F.N. Oleshchuk, a close colleague of Yaroslavsky and one of his leading deputies inside the SVB movement. The CSCRQ also had its own technical assistants, such as a special "leading secretary", V.S. Ageev, an "instructor-consultant", I.N. Uzkov and a typist, R.N. Lekhtman.³² However, most of these members were "dead souls" as the composition of this organ was vague. Membership in this commission would thus seem to have been a mere formality with the exception of three of its most prominent members, Smidovich, Krasikov, and Tuchkov, who were working there, at least to some extent, regularly.³³

The minor importance of the CSCRQ is clear when we compare the "battalions" of the VTsIK's personnel – 27 secretaries working in the Nationality Section of the VTsIK as against two secretaries working in the CSCRQ.³⁴ However, the commission for religious matters was busy not only with trivialities. The real importance of this commission lay in the fact that it was a significant religious political forum for party officials in Moscow. It represented the will

32 GARF f.5263, op.1, d. 32, rol. 1.

33 The list of the people attending the meetings of the CSCRQ during 1930-1933 consisted of various "middle" party officials. The only active participants were Smidovich, as chairman, Krasikov and Tuchkov. Others, such as J.S. Pronin, Nikitina, Iskryanistova (NKTrud), Matveev, Vishnyakov (NKYust), Iznekov, Podchufareva (Mosoblspolkom), Vladimirova (NKVD), Polyansky, Khromov, Antonov (NKID), Stepanov, Bogomolov (NKYust), V.N. Yakovleva (1884-1941), V.J. Timofeev, N.I. Martemyanov, E.F. Muravev, D. Korkmassov, Y.A. Yakovlev (1896-1938), Fedotov, Bodreev, I.E. Lyubimov (1882-1939), Boldyrev, N.A. Semashko (1874-1949), Korkin, Kandybin and Koltsarin attended less regularly. Also technical experts such as Svirshevsky (Rosstakh), Orlov (Gosstrakh), Gorbunov (Glavstotsstrakh), Bystrivsky (Lesohim), Antonov (NKVD), Oleshchuk (SVB), Arkhipov (NKTrud RSFSR), Lirtsman (Trudstrakh), Nosov (Glavstotstrakh), Davidov (NKF), Podpashensky (Rudmetalltorg), P.I. Lebedev (Polyansky, Valerian, 1881-1948) (Mospo), Shiryayev (Mosobispolkom), Shternberg (Mosobispolkom), Kuznetsov, Lidzhdan (NKF) and Korovin (NKF) attended occasionally. The institutions these people represented (insurance, lumbering, scrap-metal etc.) clearly shows that the Soviet regime was interested in capitalizing on believers economically. The Cult Commission was also assisted by two technical "consultants" and secretaries (from the VTsIK) such as Semen Mikhailovich Vorobei, Nikolai Pavlovich Orleansky, together with their own secretary, Olga Zakharovna Babicheva.

34 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 31 (pkvk 2, 3/9 -33) "Совещания по рассмотрению и утверждению штатов по отделам ВЦИК на 1934 год." Figures are from 1934.

of Moscow and reflected the attitudes of Soviet civil servants. The documents of the Cult Commission reflect a wide range of different opinions inside the monolithic ruling regime during 1929–1938. Moreover, in the relations between the commission and local organs, we may catch a good glimpse of everyday Soviet administrative practices. This commission was also an advocate in favour of achieving a unified and coordinated religious policy in the Soviet Union. Although this organ could not conduct any real discussions, officials inside the CSCRQ were able to write memos and reports for higher institutions. In addition, it also worked as an "appeals court" with regard to the closure of churches.

3. Step one: financial exploitation

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At the very beginning of its rule, the Bolshevik regime seemed to be oversensitive in the matter of church bells. The origin of Communist hostility towards church bells can be traced to the battles of the Civil War (1918–1921) when, occasionally, the sounding of summoning bells warned peasants of approaching Communist raids, thus attracting the hostile attention of atheist officials. Church bells, no doubt, symbolized the uncontrollable spirit of the Russian peasantry, the sounding of summoning bells always being a reminder of their independence of the ruling regime. One may even note a historical resemblance between the confiscating of the church bells of the peasantry and an incident during the reign of Ivan III (1440–1505) when the *veche*-bell of independent-minded Novgorod was shipped to Moscow on Ivans orders. In both cases, the autocratic regime could not tolerate an independent opposition.³⁵

In its propaganda the Soviet regime offered various pretexts for the silencing of the church bells. As Tuchkov mentioned in a certain letter to the NKVD, the "legalistic" argument for repressive actions was the contention that the sound of ecclesiastical bells "contradicted the principle of the separation of church and state." Another "explanation" was of a more practical nature; according to Tuchkov, the sound of

35 Martin 1995b, 254. Concerning the incident in the Aleksandr Nevsky monastery, Petrograd, in 1918 (the victim – Father P. Skipetrov, the first martyr, being killed by Kronstadt sailors). ASPT 1994, 88. See also Clements 1980, 131–133; Farnsworth 1980, 100–101; Ward 1993, 45.

bells also had harmful social effects. Especially in urban areas "it disturbed" both the work and the rest of working people. Consequently, it was necessary to restrict and forbid summoning by means of church bells. Tuchkov concluded his explanations by stating that local officials had the practical duty of executing the plan to restrict the tolling of church bells.³⁶

It is difficult to assess how sincere this worry was about the effects the ringing of church bells had on the daily lives of workers. Perhaps it is easier to find primary sources which clearly demonstrate that the outlawing of the tolling of bells and, later, initiatives to confiscate them by the state were carried out mainly for economic reasons - owing to a chronic lack of foreign currency in the Soviet Union.

In 1930, Soviet society was in the throes of an industrialization fever. To surpass the five-year plan was the strategic target of the Kremlin in 1930-1933, and the requirements of over-fulfilling the plan were dictating the decisions of Soviet officials at that time. In public life, the demand for raw materials together with categorical orders from above emerged to eliminate with bottlenecks in Soviet industry. In this sense, it was the first *pyatiletka* and its grandiose targets that provoked the policy of confiscating church bells. Among other things, the Soviet state lacked non-ferrous metals for industrial needs, e.g.,

36 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d.2 "Колокольный звон, производимый на всю данную округу церковниками, резким образом противоречит принципу отделения церкви от государства, ибо по бытовым условиям и правам широких безрелигиозных масс, особенно города, он мешает труду и использованию трудящимся населением его отдыха...при всех этих условиях и при наличии соответствующих требований, идущих со стороны культурно выросших широких трудовых масс, необходимо нашим правительственным органам встать на путь применения в отношении к церковному колокольному звону строго ограничительных и даже запретительных мер...при проведении этих мероприятий местные общественные организации обязаны предварительно провести широкую подготовительную кампанию..." See comments on Tuchkov's lecture from Vasileva & Knyshevsky 1994, 228-229. The theme that the church bells were "disturbing" the Soviet cultural work of the masses was repeated quite often in public demands for closing the churches and in newspapers. See TsGA SPb f. 7383, op.1, d. 70, (гараж No.2.) "Выписки из протоколов отчетных собраний совета Ц.Г.Р. с наказами о снятии колоколов." These different Soviet explanations and pretexts had usually one common cause: the good of the people. Whether the churches were located "too near" kolkhozes or churches existed "somewhere near" factories or kolkhozes "confused" the Soviet cultural life or were harmful "in socialist education of the proletarian masses." See for example, TsGA SPb f. 1000, op.48, d.37, l. 185 "В президиуме тихонского райисполкома 1931."

electrification. Furthermore, the Soviet economy had earlier obtained its non-ferrous metals from foreign markets. According to this logic, church bells turned out to be a huge reservoir of coloured metals, i.e. money for the Soviet regime.

There is a notable historical resemblance between the campaign of 1921–22 and the situation at the beginning of the 1930s. In 1921–1922, the ROC had been ransacked by the Soviet authorities for "the good of the hungry in the Volga area." Later, in the 1930s it seemed that the ROC was forced to hand over all that remained as a new secular *hostia* in order to meet the unrealistic targets of over-industrialization. Moreover, the Bolshevik regime seemed to act according to the example set by Peter the Great, who in his effort to strengthen Russia militarily confiscated church bells in order to turn them into cannons.

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The preparations for looting churches of their bells began as early as 1929, accompanied by a newspaper campaign expressing the government's worry that the "noise" of ecclesiastical bells was disturbing workers. First, the attention of the Soviet public was raised by newspapers which underlined Soviet economy's desperate shortage of coloured metals. These tones could be detected, for example, in *Izvestiya* of 5 January, 1929. This article, "*To fight against the deficit of coloured metals*", stated dispassionately that the Soviet Union wanted to avoid dependency on foreign markets.³⁷

This initiative was quickly seized up various Soviet organisations and it seems there were eager zealots of the Cultural Revolution who, for example, in the Moscow area were quick to forbid the tolling of bells on the local *ispolkom* level. These "masses" of Communist vigilantes turned this matter into a burning political question. As the protocols of the CSCRQ mention, the demand to confiscate bells for

37 "...Страна наша идет по пути к освобождению от иностранных рынков цветного металлосо сырья...максимально приблизить момент полной эмансипации от заграничных рынков, а до тех пор ослабить эту зависимость – задача неотложная." *Izvestiya*, 5 January 1929, No. 4. "На борьбу с дефицитом цветных металлов." According to Vasileva and Knyshevsky, the demand to confiscate church bells for the benefit of industrialization was clearly articulated for the first time by the "Red Soviet Professor" P.V. Gidulyanov. In his book "*Church bells in the Service of Magic and Czarism*" he stressed how Soviet industry could easily acquire metals by melting down church bells. The main emphasis in this justification lies in the phrase "without bother"; the Soviet power could receive those "deficit metals" without expending too much effort. Vasileva & Knyshevsky 1994, 226.

the benefit of industrialization was initially articulated on 15 December 1929 by the secretariat of the VTsIK and later on 20 December 1929 "with Bolshevik-tempo" by the "Fraction of the RKP(b)." Subsequently, this initiative was passed on to the Cult Commission which discussed it for the first time on 31 December 1929. At this meeting, the Cult Commission went so far as to introduce the "NEP style" into the debate process. The debate actually started with the issue of the confiscating of church bells and was extended to other topics such as earlier antireligious activities in the Soviet Union. During this discussion one of the members of the new commission (Nikitina) showed her dissatisfaction with Soviet religious policy and declared that there seemed to be no order in the closure of churches and the confiscation of church bells. Her accusations of anarchy (стихийность) and disorder could be interpreted as serious charges; in the middle of the Cultural Revolution these kinds of accusations were usually directed at those who were out of favour. Understandably enough, another member of this commission, (Pronin) fiercely protested against these charges and argued that Soviet antireligious work was devoid of anarchy. This quarrel was not settled until 6 February 1930, when the chairman of this commission, Smidovich, made a mediation effort concerning the confiscation of church bells and melting them down.³⁸

Later, on 10 April 1930, this initiative was issued as a decree. According to the special amendment introduced by the Prime Minister Aleksei Ivanovich Rykov (1881–1938) on 8 August 1930, the right to "limit" summoning by church bells was given to the local authorities. As Vasileva and Knyshevsky have stressed, the central authorities

38 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 5. (pkvk 3, 31/12 1929); GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 1. (pkvk 7, 6/2 1930). According to many accounts, local officials acted independently and with haste. The hotheads of the Cultural Revolution started to restrict summoning by church bells earlier than officials demanded and without any order from above. The Soviet regime did not oppose this. As Pravda later explained, this spontaneous activity led to the decision to prohibit the summoning by bells and was done as a result of the "demands of social and workers organizations" (общественных и рабочих организаций). Pravda, 30 January 1930, No. 29 (4474). "Хроника." These initiatives to use churches for the benefit of Soviet industry turned into a massive popular campaign sponsored by the Soviet newspapers. See, Izvestiya, 6 January, 1930, No. 6(3853) "Без божьих пут - на новый путь." The slogan of these communist vigilantes seemed to be: "Кто склонен мечтать, тот не способен бороться." See also Izvestiya, 30 January, 1930, No. 29(3876) "Колокольный звон в Москве запрещен."



The loot and the looters. Source: KN 1930, No. 5.

could count on the local officials understanding of this directive "correctly." This quasi-democratic promise of local "support", which local officials should secure from populace before confiscating, of course represented a discreet call to confiscate as many church bells as possible.³⁹ This principle of local decision-making was also duly emphasized in the additional instructions which the secretariat of the VTsIK sent to the Moscow district procurator, when he asked for more details concerning the confiscating of church bells. According to these instructions, the individual city ispolkom or the raion's ispolkom had the last word in this process, thus giving the impression

39 Vasileva & Knyshevsky 1994, 227–228. According to the general plan articulated by Rykov, looted church bells were to be handed to state organs such as Rudmetaltorg or Metallom. (GARF f.5263, op.1, d.2 "С.С.С.Р. Совет труда и обороны 13-го декабря 1939 г."; GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 1 (pkvk 8, 26/2 1930). According to reports forwarded the Cult Commission, local authorities such as *ispolkoms* did not object to the looting of church bells because they were considered "state property." GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 1. (pkvk 10, 26/3 1930).

that the Soviet people were in favour of closing down churches.⁴⁰

According to the original plan which the CSCRQ received from the Soviet Prime Minister Rykov, the Soviet government intended to confiscate not less than 25 thousand tonnes of metals by January-July 1931 in the Russian RSFSR. For Uzbekistan, the figure was considerably lower – 4 thousand tonnes (understandable enough), and from Bashkiriya only one thousand tonnes. The suggested strategy was simple: all bells should be confiscated from churches which were forbidden to toll them. In other cases, where the ringing of bells was not forbidden, Soviet officials should take only "useless church bells" (лишние колокола). This broad interpretation opened the way for all kinds of local machinations; the actual decision to restrict the ringing the bells was made, as mentioned above, by the council of the city or the raion's ispolkom.⁴¹ In accordance with Soviet economic plans, these metals were to be utilized for the benefit of industrialization.⁴² But according to one telling remark made by Rykov himself, the real objective was even more banal. The Soviet regime was planning to melt the church bells and turn them into coins. As Rykov's letter of 23 October 1930 to the leaders of the autonomous Sovnarkom's, S.I. Syrtsov (1893–1938) in RSFSR, V.Y. Chubar (1891–1939) in Ukraine and N.M. Goloded (1894–1937) in Belorussia⁴³ reveals, the whole campaign was actually undertaken in order to save money. The main emphasis was not to avoid importing copper or bronze from abroad. On the evidence of Rykov's letter, it is clear

40 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 2. "Выписка из протокола No. 30 заседания секретариата Всероссийского Центрального Исполнительного Комитета Советов, 15 декабря 1929 г.". See also NK, 155 "Докладная записка НКВД КАССР в Карельский Обком ВКП(Б) о выполнении директив советской власти в области религии. Июнь 1930 г."

41 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 2, l. 8 "Предложения ВСНХ СССР о проведении изъятия колоколов в городах и указания председателя СНК СССР Рыкова по этому вопросу правительствам союзных республик."

42 See the order of STO signed by V. Schmidt. GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 1, l. 37. "Постановление Совета Труда и Оборона 8 апреля 1930 г." The text of this order is also published in RPTsKG, 272–273.

43 ...изъятие излишних колоколов необходимо осуществить по возможности быстрее (так как мы решили их использовать в первую очередь для чеканки мелкой разменной монеты, которая до сих пор чеканилась на импортной меди) не придавая этому политического значения и излишней огласки... GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 2, l. 9. "Пояснение председателя СНК и СТО А.И. Рыкова к директиве об изъятии колоколов и их использовании в городах союзных республик 23 октября 1930 г." See also Vasileva & Knyshevsky 1994, 230.

the entire scheme of confiscating the church bells was initiated primarily in order to turn church bells not into cannons, as Peter the Great had done, but into coins.⁴⁴

As O. Khlevnyuk has stressed, Stalin took very personally matters relating to the accumulation of state funds; they involved questions of political loyalty to himself. He had given a categorical order not to use state funds to purchase raw materials or metals from abroad. Because Stalin made it impossible to procure non-ferrous metals from abroad, Rykov was obliged to confiscate metals wherever he could, i.e. churches.⁴⁵

The procedure that the Soviet government adopted in preparing to confiscate church bells was also applied to other objects of value in the Soviet Union at that time. The needs of industrialization had top priority. The Soviet regime was ready to sell anything it could; it even sold Russian art treasures from the Hermitage in order to get foreign currency. Even the introduction of the GULAG was to some extent the offspring of this hunt for hard currency. In accordance with the Sovnarkom's orders, the OGPU expanded the system of labor camps primarily as a means of earning foreign currency.⁴⁶

There are also other examples showing how the 5-year plans impacted on Soviet religious policy. For example, in 1930 the CSCRCQ wanted to introduce a tax for those sectarians who were released from military duties on grounds of their pacifist convictions. But the commission concluded, the planned tax would hurt those of *serednyak* and *bednyak* origin. Therefore the commission proposed an experiment; groups of young sectarians (comprising over 1000 people) should be compelled to do heavy forest work for 24 months. The Cult Commission justified this proposal by stating that "political work" under these conditions would certainly give good results, i.e., convert these young sectarians to Communism. However, the presence of representatives from *Lesohim* and the NKVD expose the true nature of this initiative – these sectarians were to serve as slaveworkers, in

44 GARF f.5263, op.1, d.2, l. 9. "Выписка из протокола №. 30 секретариата Всероссийского центрального исполнительного комитета Советов 15 декабря 1929 г. Справка. К вопросу об урегулировании колокольного звона в церквях."

45 Khlevnyuk 1996, 87–89.

46 Jakobson 1993, 117–118, 121–122; Bacon 1996, 42–47. See also Vasileva & Knyshevsky 1994, 232–239.

a kind of "protogulag" as earners of hard currency.⁴⁷

The actual campaign for confiscating church bells took place at the height of collectivization, at the same time as officials were closing down churches. The speed of this campaign did not, however, satisfy state trusts such as "Metallom" and "Rudmetalltorgs" which were responsible for procuring metal. In their letters to the CSCSRQ, these juggernauts of Soviet metal trusts or other representatives of the Soviet economy complained that the campaign of stripping metal from churches was proceeding too slowly. As a certain deputy of the Commissariat of Finances, Karp, declared in one of these letters, the question of removing church bells was a most urgent one: the confiscating of this metal had a "budget nature." Moreover, the confiscated church bells were not the only source of precious metals which the Soviet had set its sight on: the Cult Commission even evolved a plan to confiscate all metal crosses from ecclesiastical graveyards.⁴⁸

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Nevertheless, it was clear that moral reservations or protests of believers did not carry enough weight in the face of the demands of the Soviet economy. The higher authorities increasingly put pressure for local officials to confiscate more and more church bells. The usual justification was, as one circular to the Leningrad oblast states, that

47 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 1 (pkvk 5, 16/1 1930).

48 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 12 rol. 2 "Постоянной комиссии по вопросам культов при Президиуме ВЦИК 4. декабря 1931"; "В Центральную постоянную комиссию по вопросам культов при Президиуме ВЦИК 8.9.1931"; GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 30 "Председателю культовой комиссии при ВЦИК т. Смидовичу 14.1. 1933." Concerning graveyards: GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 12 "Инструкция постоянной комиссии при Президиуме ВЦИК по вопросам культов. О порядке устройства, закрытия и ликвидации кладбищ и порядке сноса надмогильных памятников." Church bells were needed for more grotesque purposes - for the relief and panelling of the facade of the Lenin Library. GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 19, rol. 3 "К вопросу об изъятии колоколов из восьми церквей гор. Москвы и использовании их на горельефы при отделке и облицовке здания Публичной библиотеки СССР имени В.И. Ленина 22. августа 1932 г." See also GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 22 (pkvk 3, 26/5 1933). The goal of this campaign proved too optimistic as was the case with nearly all the economic plans in the 1930s. As archival sources testify, the target was to confiscate 130 000 tonnes of bronze for industry. The actual tempo of this campaign was, however, quite slow. Statistics from archives show that during 1929-1930 only 1.1 thousand tonnes were procured by these campaigns. See GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 4-6. "Справка о фактическом поступлении колокольной бронзы на Московский электролитный завод имени Молотова, о варианте ее поступления за пятилетку и расчеты стоимости ее реализации. 17 октября 1930 г."



The confiscation of church-Bells in full swing.

these metals were of "great importance to the state." However, as time went on, repeated demands for a more energetic looting of church bells appeared to be of little avail. For example, at the end of 1933, a certain representative of a local organisation in Leningrad explained to higher party authorities that most of the church bells had already been confiscated in their area. As the local archives from St. Petersburg testify, most valuable objects in the possession of religious organizations – precious metals and church bells – had been expropriated by 1933.⁴⁹

49 TsGA SPb f. 1000, op. 51, d. 26, l. 59. "Циркулярно. Председателю Ленинградской области 3/VIII-33."

To sum up the fate of confiscated church bells, we could conclude that the perceived needs of the Soviet economy outweighed traditional values and the needs of the believers. It appears that these bells were melted down and used for various purposes, i.e., coins, machines, etc. However, the main benefit went to (together with new coins) the Soviet military industry which demanded the lion's share of the loot. As a certain document from the STO – Council of Labour and Defence, reveals, the military industry was anxious to utilize these metals as a part of the Soviet defence budget. The total "take" from this questionable campaign was as follows: the Soviet government confiscated 385 310 church bells amounting to approximately 37 425 tonnes of metal.⁵⁰

Moreover, the campaign to confiscate church bells appears to have been another kind of success story for the Soviet system. A substantial part of the population seemed to be supporting the Soviet regime in its quest after the church bells. As Yaroslavsky testified later, communist officials hesitated at the beginning; the decision to limit the summoning of the church bells to a minimum was not an unanimous one. As he mentioned, there were some "comrades" who were opposed to this action.⁵¹ But once the legal formalities and rules of confiscation had been resolved the campaign was escalated with public support. According to Soviet newspapers, after some major cities such as Kostroma, Arkhangelsk, Yaroslavl, Bryansk, Samara and Smolensk had already confiscated all bells, there was no point in continuing with legal preparations.⁵²

50 Ist, 79–84. "No:1. Докладная записка в комитет резервов при СТО об использовании колокольной бронзы. Комитету резервов при СТО 29.X.1933. No:3/7821."

51 "...Я помню, что на заседании антирелигиозной комиссии, даже при некотором сопротивлении со стороны отдельных руководящих товарищей..." YIV, 88. "О пятилетнем плане "работы безбожников". Доклад на заседании Исполбюро ЦС СВБ СССР 29.1. 1930 г." See, for example, how P. Smidovich in 1929 opposed the principle of over-taxing, because it as contradicted proletarian "church policy." However, this represented only a temporary pause in this matter. See AGMIR, f. 63, op. 3, d. 197, ll. 14, 15-31.

52 "...События пошли таким образом, что эти планы были сметены стихийно развивающимся процессом." YIV, 88 "О пятилетнем плане "работы безбожников." Доклад на заседании Исполбюро ЦС СВБ СССР 29.1. 1930." See also LP 1930, No. 9 "Прекратить колокольный звон." LP 1930, No. 35. "Колокола – в фонд индустриализации." See also KN 1931, No. 5. "Колокола."

4. Step two: liquidation of churches

As mentioned above, according to official Soviet propaganda, the closing down of the churches was supposed to be executed with strong support from the local population. The Soviet regime worked under the optimistic assumption that the populace, or at least a majority of urban inhabitants supported its antireligious campaigns. The resisting part of the population was often described as a "dark mass" under the influence of kulaks and priests. In Bolshevik thinking, the phrase "uncultured masses" characterized the Soviet countryside which was a kingdom of darkness (*temnoe tsarstvo*) fighting against the Communist patrimony of enlightenment (*prosveshchenie*).⁵³ Moreover, according to Soviet ideology, women were more prone to succumb to religious propaganda than men. In reality, we may assume that support for the closure of local parish churches hardly existed on the massive scale that the Soviet regime would have us believe.

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The question of supposed popular support for Bolsheviks and for antireligious campaigns is a subject of controversy. On the one hand, there is extant an impressive amount of letters, for example, received by the journal *Bezbozhnik* from its correspondents in the provinces demanding more active measures against local priests and kulaks. This wave of letters coming from rural correspondents could have led the Soviet regime to believe that the majority of the working people were in favour of closing down the churches. Although the reports of these peasant correspondents must be studied with considerable reservations, it appears, nonetheless, that there existed an amorphous antireligious movement among the pro-Soviet part of the population. These *Bezbozhnik* letters reflect the hostility of some communists of peasant origin as well as "neutral" people brought about by the increasing activity of religious organizations. The genre of these letters is unique: in these documents "ordinary" peasants or communist correspondents are usually demanding the liquidation of a local church or forbidding some local Baptist group from convening. As a source of study, however, these letters are quite problematic. First, they are hand-written and barely legible, and, second, they often contain fantastic "stories" and "accounts" of some unbearable situation in some

53 Joravsky 1985, 93-94. See also KPSSvr IV, 102; SPS, 296, 531.

particular village or factory.⁵⁴

The popular nature of these confiscations is a rather controversial issue. For example, in the Leningrad area the local SVB demanded that tolling the church bells should cease and that these objects should be confiscated for the benefit of Soviet industry. This petition contained 3488 signatures.⁵⁵

However, even the great amount of signatures or numerous articles in Soviet newspapers does not prove that the majority of the population was for closing down churches. As S.A. Shinkarchuk, a Russian sociologist, who has researched political opinions prevailing among the Soviet people during the 1930s, has remarked, it is actually impossible to ascertain how much the Soviet regime enjoyed genuine popularity.⁵⁶

The real significance of these letters was perhaps that these lengthy lists of signatures constituted a desperately needed sign of popular

54 Note how the antireligious bravados, headlines and editorials of the Soviet newspapers and letters coming to the SVB resemble each other. See some examples from GARF f. 5407, op. 2, d. 30 "Надо закрыть церковь!"; "Пора бы закрыть поповскую лавочку: фабрика Пролетарий." See also other examples, GARF f. 5407, op.2, d. 25, 28, 29, 30, 34, 37, 38, 39, 42, 44, 94, 99, 127. The correspondents stressed how priests were "meddling" in Soviet elections in 1928-1929 and were aggressively conducting propaganda against the Soviet rule. See also some examples: GARF f. 5407, op. 2, d. 174 "Корреспонденция с мест о разоблачении попов как мародеров и врагов советской власти. 15 января 1929 -10 февраля 1929 г.; ГАРФ ф. "5407, оп. 2, д. 176 "Статьи, заметки и прочая корреспонденция о религиозной пропаганде духовенства и кулаков среди населения и их антисоветской деятельности" 1929 г.; "GARF f. 5407, op.2, d.185 Статьи, заметки и прочая корреспонденция о деятельности различных религиозных сект (баптистов, евангелистов), поступившие в феврале 1929." See also Fainsod 1958, 435; Solomon 1984, 130, 150-153. However, according to Glennys Young church councils and active members of the local churches were active in soviet elections during the late NEP. As she concludes, "...Attempting to resist the Party's increasing attempts to control - if not eliminate - rural politics, members of church councils served as both candidates and campaign managers during elections to the village soviets..." Young 1996, 383. Her discoveries seem to verify the fact that antireligious movement in 1929 was merely a response causing a retribution by the Soviet regime. See also the sullen reaction of émigré observers in the 1930s concerning the popularity of the regime and religious persecutions, see Put 1930, No. 23, 81, 94. "Почему закрываются церкви в России?": SV 1931, No. 19, 16. "Из письма рабочего."

55 TsGA SPb f.1000, op.48, d. 77a, l. 14.

56 As Shinkarchuk emphasizes: "...того сейчас практически невозможно определить, какая часть населения поддерживала большевиков, большинство или меньшинство." Shinkarchuk 1995, 32.

support for the Soviet regime. One of the attributes of the Soviet regime was that they themselves regarded Soviet rule as a "people's government" desperate to pay heed to the voice of the people. As Chris Ward maintains...

"Nevertheless, as the search for unity drove élites hither and thither, 'democratic fantasy'(criticism, verification, the constitution, hints of party democratization, Ezhov's radicalism) did produce a kind of populist régime; one characterized, not by a democracy but a plebiscitary demagogy: tyrannical polity involving chaos, mistrust and paranoia which provided lethal valves for the appeasement of plebeian anger."⁵⁷

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It is hard to ascertain if the press campaigns of the years 1928–1929 had actually given rise to such a massive "plebeian anger"⁵⁸ in favour of aggressive antireligious measures. Most likely not. However, these complaints and "alarming" letters constituted a solid pretext for the Soviet regime and if a local official wanted to respect the will of Moscow, he needed this "support", whether it was real or artificial.⁵⁹

According to the official procedures found in archive documents, it was the local administration which was obliged to make a detailed scheme of closing down churches (сведения и планы). This "grand scheme" of closing the churches was supposed to proceed in three stages. First, local officials had to justify their initiative by recourse to "social needs"; i.e. claim that they needed a particular church for social purposes. These social needs usually involved plans to convert

57 Ward 1993, 146–147. During these congress plenums of the VTsIK, antireligious activists showed their dissatisfaction over too slow a pace in the closing down of churches. The vigilantes even criticized the high officials, who seemed to be too tolerant of religious cults. VSS XIV (Z3), 14; VSS XIV (Z11), 26. See also VSS XIV (Z11) and Fitzpatrick 1992, 119–120.

58 Iconoclasm was, according to Richard Stites, one of the "innovative factors" of the Russian Revolution. Stites 1990a, 86. This mood of destruction was evident in many cases, when churches were not converted to suit social purposes, but simply destroyed. See, for example, KN 1930, 15 February, No. 5.

59 As an interesting detail, certain German intelligence reports realized this "plebiscitary" pattern of the Bolshevik religious policy. According to one of these reports the Soviet population during the 1930s was pressured to petition local officials to close churches. This allowed Soviet authorities to recognize the unanimous wishes of the population and close the churches. This was, according to these reports, only a façade; when German troops arrived in 1941 the churches were full of people again. DGIR 1977, 36.

the churches for cultural and social use – schools, clubs, nurseries or cinema theatres. Second, since the central government did not finance these operations of closing down churches, the local organs had to finance such affairs by themselves. Finally, in executing these closures, the local officials were obliged to conduct antireligious campaigns in newspapers. However, the reality proved rather different from these plans. It seems that these official, rather complex procedures, remained as "Potemkin's facades" fabricated by officials from the centre. In the middle of collectivization and industrialization the local officials acted more autonomously in closing down churches.⁶⁰ It is difficult to assess what actually happened, but it seems that the drive against active churches was more aggressive in urban areas than in the countryside. As official statistics from the Leningrad archives show, the city of Leningrad lost the majority of its churches. However, in the countryside the percentage of active churches was considerably higher. Before the revolution there were 550 functioning churches in the Leningrad city area, but in 1931 only 160 of these were open. In the Leningrad oblast, the number of closed churches was considerably lower; only 252 out of 1600 were shut.⁶¹

It seems that local officials did not always work in unison with antireligious vigilantes. See for example the decision made by the Leningrad oblast Admnadzor in which local officials protested against the closure of the one church in Murmansk okrug. The officials justified their decision by stressing that the original decision to close the church was made without consulting believers, only the "инноваторы-финны" had voted for the closing of the church. Finally, the local officials stressed that if this church is closed, the believers would have no place where they could "satisfy their religious needs."⁶²

60 The reality often proved rather different from the "paper orders" from Moscow. The campaigns of 1929 were executed by means of bureaucratic methods. As Merle Fainsod realized when investigating the Smolensk Archive, most of the incidents involving closing down churches were "administratively inspired". Fainsod 1958, 435. See the Soviet provincial accounts on the "dangerous activity" of the clergy, Schlesinger 1956, 113, 133, 138, 281.

61 TsGA SPb f. 1000, op. 48, d. 77, ll. 154. See also Krasnov-Levitin 1977, 67, 73. See the Leningrad area newspapers, see LP 1930, No. 19, "Заводы предлагают Ленсовету"; LP 1930, No. 20 "Рабочий наказ ленинградскому совету." See the situation in Moscow; in 1930 official ROC had 500 churches, two years later there were only 87 functionable churches, see IRPTs, 92. See also the situation in Soviet Karelia, NK, 335–336.

62 TsGA SPb f. 7383, op.1, d. 69 "В Президиум Ленингр. Облсполкома

The reality of closing down churches was often more banal than the ideological desire of the Godless-movement or zealous wishes of the "interventionists" (as an agitpunkt of the kulaks and the bourgeoisie). As a matter of fact, local officials were usually willing to impose over-taxation on churches and to introduce new "insurance rates" for buildings in religious use in order to obtain money and only subsequently to close down the church. Even in the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, the VTsIK tried to restrict punitive taxation together with other arbitrary measures. For example, in 1929 Smidovich resisted suggestions to introduce punitive taxes for churches as "contradicting the separation decree"; according to him, the proletarian state could not accept a "church policy" which was simply punitive in nature. However, general pressure against religious organizations grew with the tempo of the Cultural Revolution and the question of imposing reasonable taxes became trivial. The question of taxation was later passed to the Sovnarkom and later a special commission was created to resolve this matter. The outcome was that local officials were, as a matter of course, completely free to execute their policy of "squeezing and liquidating" churches.⁶³

As a result, believers reacted to the massive closure of churches by sending numerous petitions and complaints to the VTsIK and Kalinin. These complaints were then forwarded to the Cult Commission, which was obliged to function as an "Court of Appeal" in the face of complaints from believers and demands from militant atheists.

Briefly, the Cult Commission in Moscow was split between two competing views. On the one hand, officials in Moscow were aware that collectivization and Cultural Revolution had instilled strong "antireligious feelings" among communist activists and party officials. The early 1930s was an era for antireligiozniki; at the beginning of the 1930s it was fashionable to be a member of a bezbozhnik cell. Moreover, to close a church was one way for local apparatchiks to prove their loyalty to Moscow.

This pressure from the "godless front" is also apparent in the

27.8.1930."

63 AGMIR f. 63, op. 3, d. 197, ll. 14, 15-31. In some cases, Soviet officials tried to justify their confiscations of churches with more "artistic reasons". TsGA SPb f. 7384, op. 15, d. 230 "По вопросу использования здания Смольного собора."

protocols of the Cult Commission in Moscow. In one particular session the commission discussed problems arising from the broad masses participating in the closing down of churches. As mentioned already, the spontaneity of these zealous activists was an irritating surprise for officials in Moscow. The question was whether to merely tolerate such occasional "illegal" activity or to actually encourage it. The Soviet system was always very wary of any activity it could not control. The word "стихийность" itself signified something uncontrollable, a term that could be used to describe both "counter-revolutionary" or "anti-soviet" activity. Finally, the Cult Commission resolved this matter by resorting to a kind of "judgement of Solomon." On 6 February 1930 the CSCRRQ decided that it was necessary to discourage some "illegal" acts by certain persons and groups when closing down churches. However, at the same time the commission stressed that it was necessary to encourage the masses to close down churches. Therefore the commission decided to resolve this matter by simplifying the process of closing churches and by drafting of new instructions which would assist the locals to execute these operation with better ways. A special sub-commission was set up consisting of Krasikov, Tuchkov and Ikryanistova, to make proposals on this matter. The problem, however, remained the same. When the local officials were also the main beneficiaries of these closings, it seemed to be impossible enforce the law and order in this issue.⁶⁴

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5. Step three: liquidation of servants of cults

Along with the campaigns to confiscate church bells and to obliterate churches, the Soviet regime was obliged to contemplate the fate of the clergy. The first serious post-NEP blow against the clergy was the collectivization of the Russian countryside starting in the Autumn of 1928 with the property of many priests having their property confiscated and being deported to Siberia together with kulaks.⁶⁵

64 "...Поэтому самочинное действие отдельных лиц и групп необходимо своевременно пресекать. в то же время должны быть приняты меры к развязыванию действий самих масс...." GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 1 (pkvk 7, 6/2 1930).

65 According to Ivanitsky, the Soviet security police – OGPU arrested (from 1

However, the dilemma of what to do with these "parasites" remained a burning issue for Soviet rulers. According to official Soviet legislation, the clergy was an "illegal" part of Soviet society. In reality, the village clergy were an inseparable part of the pre-collectivized Russian countryside. During the NEP they were allowed to cultivate their share of the *mir's* land as a payment for their ecclesiastical services.

In the midst of the Cultural Revolution this contradiction between accepted practice and official Soviet ideology was even more glaring. However, at the beginning of the 1930s the Soviet regime was finally ready to outlaw the servants of cults and relegate them to the margin of Soviet society. As can be seen from the CSCRQ protocols of 6 January 1929, the Soviet government was extremely anxious to attack the "semilegal" position of the clergy and restrict the economic influence of the servants of cults. During this meeting, chekist Tuchkov strongly underscored in his lecture to the commission that the "servants of cults" were forbidden to receive any "illegal" income. Moreover, he repeated that clergy was forbidden to use land in any way; the same was case when if the clergy was "exploiting the labor." Tuchkov wanted to revitalize the Soviet interpretation of the law which stated that all servants of cults were to be deprived of all of their political rights. Although possibilities for free trade had been restricted from 1928, Tuchkov nevertheless maintained that "servants of cults" should not be involved in any kind of commercial activities. This leader of the security police stressed that officials should take care that those who gave up their ecclesiastical duties should be entitled to work, including agricultural work. Tuchkov underlined that employment of ex-priests should be conducted discreetly, according to secret instructions and these operations should be coordinated by labour unions, the Commissariat of Labour, Agriculture, Justice, and the Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKTrud, NKZem, NKYust and NKVD).⁶⁶ However, this "favourable" proposition of Tuchkov was discussed later, when a "fraction" of the leading Communist party decided in its meeting on 30 August 1930 that priests who publicly abandoned their ecclesiastical duties could be registered as ordinary workers and could apply for a new job. However, these people were

January to 15 April 1930) 5028 priests and servants of cults. Ivanitsky 1996, 115.
See also Bazarov 1991, 138-139.

66 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 1 (pkvk 4, 6/1 1929).

not supposed to work in Narkompros or in the military industry.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the logic of the situation ultimately led to the massive exploitation of the servants of cults in Soviet labour camps; it seems that even at the height of the collectivization, priests were not leaving their ecclesiastical duties as eagerly as had been hoped. As the Soviet economy needed more workers, the system of Gulag was automatically applied to all servants of cults, whether they remained in their ecclesiastical posts or not. Later the commission approved the proposition that the ex-priests should be put to work for the Soviet state.⁶⁸

As mentioned above, the Stalinist regime considered that all the servants of cults constituted a possible threat as potential organizers of peasant resistance against the Soviet power. Especially the security organs were willing to see Orthodox village priests as organizers of peasant mutiny. For example, as is evidenced in a report on a certain priest, Konstantin Andreevich Odintsev, the OGPU prosecutor made a detailed description of his rebellious acts. According to this account of 31 October 1930 (to the VTsIK Presidium's secretariat), this priest had exhorted poor peasants to armed resistance against the Soviet power. The report says that this clergyman had in 1929 gathered a meeting of peasants around him and declared to them that...

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...nobody has experienced such violence as the peasantry under the Soviet power – it has strangled them in all ways, it has taken away the land putting it under sovkhozes, imposed back-breaking taxes, taken away the last loaves of bread...Now what is waiting for you – you poor men! In order to defend yourselves, you must arm yourselves and demand freedom...do not give the state your bread surpluses...you must organize units and beat these parasites...that Soviet power will fall, it is obvious, but if we help this [process], the end [of Soviet rule] will come sooner...⁶⁹

67 GARF f. 5363, op. 1, d. 6, l. 9 "Выписка из протокола No. 42/с. Фракции ВКП(б). Заседание от 30 августа 1930 г.." See also RPTsKG 284–285. A great deal of former priests had been able to work as specialists of religious matters and antireligious cadres of the SVB movement. Actually, according to Daniel Peris, the SVB-movement and the newspaper *Bezbozhnik* were run by former priests and sons of priests. The SVB was the main recruiter of former priests and hired these *apostates* for working inside the SVB and, of course, for propagandistic purposes. Peris 1995, 344, 360.

68 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 1 (pkvk 12, 26/8 1930).

69 GARF f. 5263, op.1. d. 7, rol.2. "Секретариату Президиума ВЦИК 31 октября 1930."



"Antisoviet Nest." During the 1930s nearly all Orthodox monasteries were liquidated as "nests of espionage and anti-Soviet agitation." Source: Bezbozhnik 1938, No. 3.

Later this unfortunate priest⁷⁰ is mentioned as having practised propaganda inside Soviet cooperative premises. In his message to workers he utilized nationalist slogans ("..the Russian country is dead!"). He also mentioned that in case of war, the Soviet power would be certain to perish by the intervention of foreign countries. According to the OGPU's report, this particular priest was sure that the Soviet power was aiming at a kind of barshchina – a new kind of a Soviet corvée.⁷¹

70 The maximum penalty for anti-Soviet propaganda or agitation especially in "utilizing the religious or national prejudices of the masses" (с использованием религиозных или национальных предрассудков масс..) was execution. See, SZR, No. 12, 11 March 1927, 286.

71 "...погибла страна Русская, оплевали ее супостаты - коммунисты - грабят, убивают; скоро им будет конец, и они не будут знать, куда им деваться, а мы должны вылавливать их, учинять расправы. Терпите - конец соввласти близок. Скоро все страны пойдут войной и разрушат

It is quite captivating to see in how straightforward a way this notorious priest was pictured by these reports. It is also quite amusing to realize, how his sermons were full of Soviet political jargon and moreover included some rhetoric from the Bible. Thus, it is quite likely that these "sermons" were fabricated. The Orthodox clergy, no doubt being against the destruction of the traditional Russian countryside, hardly could practise this kind of politicized propaganda in order to create organized and militant resistance against the Bolsheviks.⁷² Nonetheless, the most significant detail in these many cases against Orthodox priests was the fact that the Soviet regime wanted to decapitate the potential leadership of the peasantry, which suggests that there existed literally a pathological fear of some kind of a "putch" from below. The fear of an international war that would coincide with internal peasant revolt was lurking behind these accusations and the servants of cults were indirectly blamed for a kind of a "Clemenceau statement."⁷³

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Interestingly enough, the resistance of believers did not cease once priests were arrested. Women were the last to defend their own church bells. However, in some places, arrests and lootings had made an impact on the people. In many places these repressive methods, arrests of priests and the confiscation of property led to confusion among believers and voluntary abandonment of parishes. People were afraid to come to their churches. However, there were examples of persistent

ненавистную соввласть. Это не власть, а бандиты. Если они нас мучают, то потому, что мы враги, а за что вас?...Они хотят сделать вас нищими, загнать в колхозы и закабалить на веки – не ходите в него - это барщина." GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 7, rol.2. "Секретариату Президиума ВЦИК. 31 октября 1930." See also SV, 10 October, 1931, No. 19(257). "Из письма рабочего."

72 According to Bazarov this was the case. See Bazarov 1991, 268–269.

73 On the Clemenceau statement in the communist power struggle: Deutscher 1967, 310. See other cases against priests, e.g. the case of Ivan Fedovich Kiselev: GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 14, rol. 2 "В комиссию по вопросам культов"; Прокурору Московской области 20.6.1931": Постановление Центрального Исполнительного Комитета и Совета Народных Комиссаров Союза ССР. О борьбе с контрреволюционными элементами в руководящих органах религиозных объединений 11 февраля 1930." See the NKVD reports on the religious political situation prevailing in certain districts in the USSR. According to this individual report, the situation was more than heated in the Soviet countryside; the protests and "riots" against collectivization had a religious nature. RSS, 288–291. "Rapport de la section Information du commissariat du peuple à l'Intérieur sur les déviations et abus en matière de politique religieuse (mars-juin 1930)." See also Ivanitsky 1996, 153–155, 160–161, 188.

women who were ready to resist these massive confiscations of church bells. These cases were usually taken care of with the assistance of the OGPU, i.e, with brutal methods.⁷⁴

6. Hasty retreat: Stalin's "Dizzy with success"

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The backlash against collectivization and wild rumors concerning the fierce antireligious campaigns in the Soviet Union were spreading abroad and caused international protests at the beginning of the 1930s. The Soviet press responded to these international protests with irritation; for example Yaroslavsky accused the Autocephalous Ukrainian Church, émigré generals, SR's, and Mensheviks for inspiring these protests.⁷⁵ International protests culminated on 8 February 1930 when on the behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Pius XI presented his protest against Soviet antireligious persecutions. Moreover, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York announced their dissatisfaction over the situation prevailing in Russia.⁷⁶

The Soviet newspapers responded by organizing a forceful press campaign against the Pope, the Catholic Church in Poland, and other Western protesters. According to these numerous articles, the Pope was seen to be speculating with the feelings of Polish fanatical peasants, thus giving a signal for a forthcoming crusade against the workers' state. According to other articles, German bankers were actually behind this protest, backing the Pope in his coming crusade against the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ This reaction was in part an offspring of

74 TsGA SPb f. 1000, op. 51, d. 26, ll. 87 "В президиум Ленинградского облисполкома 25/X -1934." See also TsGA SPb f. 1000, op.48, d. 77. l. 25a "Религиозные общества": Shinkarchuk 1995, 70.

75 Pravda, 6 February 1930, No. 36 (4481) "Контрреволюция под флагом церкви."

76 For Western evaluations of the Pope's protest, see Martel 1933, 84–85. On émigré evaluations of religious freedom prevailing in Russia in the 1930. See VKR 1930, No. 5(17), 9–12. "За свободу религии"; Dmitrievsky 1930, 258–262.

77 Pravda, 13 February 1930, No. 43 (4488). "Святейший спекулянт во главе "крестового похода"; Pravda, 16 March 1930, No. 74 (4519) "Германские банкиры финансируют крестовый поход." See also Pravda, 15 February 1930, No. 45 (4490). "Пахнет нефтью", "Отпор антисоветской кампании в Норвегии"; Pravda, 14 March 1930, No. 72 (4517) "Пилсудский нащупывает почву для выступления против СССР"; Sheinman 1932, 512–515. As a

the "war scare" of 1926–1927. Originally, hysteria about a coming war was created during the middle of the power struggle by the "leftist opposition." Later, Stalin found these cries of his adversaries useful in his own propaganda, when he mobilized Komsomols in his fight against older party cadres. Moreover, his push for industrialization required some extra motivation.⁷⁸

However, for the Stalinist propaganda machine, the Pope's protest seemed to justify the fear of a forthcoming attack; when the Pope and other foreign powers were protesting over religious persecutions in the USSR they seemed simply to be searching for an excuse for intervening. This touchiness which the Bolshevik regime showed in this press campaign was highlighted on 21 March 1930 by the editorial article of *Pravda* condemning prayer meetings for persecuted believers as a "full-field inspection of the forces of world counter-revolution." According to *Pravda*, the actual reason for these protests was the desire of the bourgeoisie to mobilize the masses for a "crusade" against the USSR.⁷⁹ According to this rather original logic, the capitalists of the world were willing to utilize everything in order to undermine the first socialist state. For example, a certain G. Krunin claimed in *Pravda* of 14 March 1930 that the capitalist class will pull out from the "dust-bin of history" all potential means, from "the cross and the

fascinating detail it is interesting to see how ordinary workers were harnessed to demonstrate against the "crusade of the Pope." See *Pravda*, 18 March 1939, No. 76 (4521) "Ответ трудящихся на антисоветскую кампанию церковников." Even Soviet scientists were obliged to express their dissatisfaction over the Pope's protest and appeal to the "working intelligentsia of the world." "...Религия у нас не угнетается, а с ростом сознания широких масс сама исчезает так же естественно и без принуждения, как исчезает предрассветный туман с восходом солнца. Лицемерная защита религии - только фиговый листок, которым прикрывается классовая природа этого похода, организованного против первого государства рабочих и крестьян." *Pravda*, 18 March 1930, No. 76 (4521) "Научные работники Ленинграда - к трудовой интеллигенции всего мира." For a "positive reaction of foreign workers and sympathizers, see *Pravda*, 20 March 1930, No. 78 (9523); *Pravda*, 21 March 1930, No. 79 (4524).

78 Tucker 1990, 74-76. See also Erlich 1960, 167-168.

79 "...День молебствий был рассчитан, организован и проведен как день предварительного смотра сил мировой контрреволюции...Империалисты прекрасно понимают, что довести антисоветскую кампанию до ее логического конца можно лишь прямым разгромом Советского Союза. А для этого нужны люди, нужны массы." *Pravda*, 21 March 1930, No. 79 (4524) "Класс против класса." See also *Pravda*, 22 March 1930, No. 80 (4525) "Никому не запугать Советский Союз."

Roman Pope" to oppose the Bolshevik party.⁸⁰ The above reactions and the prolonged campaign against these Western protests reveal how sensitive the Soviet regime actually was when facing foreign pressure. Even the ostracized N.I. Bukharin (1888–1938) participated in this campaign against the Vatican and blamed the papacy for being in the service of "the world's counter-revolution."⁸¹ To sum up, the Soviet press followed anxiously all foreign reactions concerning the rumoured religious persecutions inside the USSR and aggressively denied all such accusations against it.⁸²

Together with a fervent press campaign, Soviet officials arranged on 15 February 1930 an interview of Metropolitan Sergii, who was at that time the acting head of the ROC. In this interview Sergii adhered to the Stalinist propaganda lines and, in accordance with the official Soviet response, condemned protests made by foreign church leaders. Sergii denied all allegations of religious persecutions and collaboration with the Soviet state, and blamed the Pope for being hypocritical. According to Sergii, the Pope was actually defending English landlords and French-Italian magnates, and concealing the preparations being made for a war against the USSR. Sergii believed that the situation in the USSR was not so gloomy: churches were sometimes closed, but only in response to the demands of the local population, not the Godless-movement. He saw the future of the churches in a positive light, but also showed some distress over the rapid growth of atheism. However, he believed that the ROC would be able to continue its work although collectivization had brought

80 ..Поэтому из мусорного ящика истории вытаскивается для борьбы с большевиками все, что возможно, вплоть до евангелия и креста и папы римского. Таким путем наглядно демонстрируется перед всем трудящимся человечеством органическая связь и теснейшая спайка между евангелием, папой римским и кулачеством Pravda, 14 March 1930, No. 72 (4517) "Борьба за повышение товарности сельского хозяйства и контратация."

81 Pravda, 7 March 1930, No. 65 (4510) "Финансовый капитал в мантии папы (памфлет)."

82 When one examines Politburo protocols and other so-called "special folders" (особая папка) of the Politburo, it appears that this institution only payed attention to matters of religion when there was a need to react someway to foreign protests (i.e. foreign protests took place on behalf of the persecuted religious people). This was case when the Politburo faced foreign protests on behalf of Soviet Muslims. Therefore, the Politburo decided that the SCE and Agitprop should shed light on the real situation of the Muslims population in the USSR. RTsKhDNI f.17, op. 162, d. 13 (Pp. 112, 16/8–32).

about a deterioration in the circumstances of the church.⁸³

The above version of the interview was meant for public consumption⁸⁴, but in his private memorandum to Smidovich of 19 February 1930, Sergii exposed the real situation of the ROC. In this lengthy address, Sergii enumerated a list of problems relating to the excesses of harassment by local officials, the desperate economic situation of the clergy, over-taxation, "arbitrary" insurance rates, the closing down of churches by non-believers, etc.⁸⁵ Moreover, Sergii demanded the rectifying of the Soviet Constitution of 1929, which denied the right to conduct religious propaganda.⁸⁶

It is very likely that foreign reaction mentioned above, reinforced Stalin's desire to save the harvest of 1930, causing him to write the famous article "*Dizzy With Success: Problems of The Kolkhoz Movement*", published on 2 March 1930. This initiative of Stalin had a cobra-like impact on the whole process of collectivization. By April 1930, millions of peasants fled the kolkhozes and returned to their own farms. Consequently, the first phase of sovietizing the Russian countryside ended in confusion. The explanation for this hasty retreat of Stalin was simple; the chaos and peasant resistance during the

83 RPTs I, 312–316. "Интервью с главой Патриаршей Православной Церкви в СССР. Заместителем Патриаршего Местоблюстителя митрополитом Сергием и его Синодом (15.2.1930)." The interview was also signed by other church leaders such as Serafim, Metropolitan of Saratov (Aleksandrov), Aleksii (Simansky, Sergei Vladimirovich, 1877-1970, later Patriarch Aleksii I), Filipp, Archbishop of Zvenigorod (Gumilevsky), Pitirim, Bishop of Orekhovo-Zuevo (Krylov). Pravda, 16 February 1930, No. 46 (4491). "О положении православной церкви в СССР."

84 See also Pravda, 19 February 1930 "К положению православной церкви в СССР. Из интервью с главой патриаршей православной церкви в СССР. Заместителем патриаршего местоблюстителя митрополитом Сергием, данного корреспондентам иностранной печати в Москве."

85 RPTs I, 317–320. "Памятная записка Заместителя Патриаршего Местоблюстителя митрополита Нижегородского Сергия о нуждах Православной Патриаршей Церкви в СССР (19.2.1930)". See also RPTsKG, 268 "Письмо Митрополита И.Н. Старагородского П.Е.[Г.!] Смидовичу о нуждах Православной Церкви в СССР 19 февраля 1930 г."

86 "...21. Ввиду газетных статей о необходимости пересмотра Конституции СССР в смысле совершенного запрещения религиозной пропаганды и дальнейших ограничений церковной деятельности, просим защиты и сохранения за Православной Церковью тех прав, какие предоставлены ей действующими законоположениями СССР..." RPTs I, 320. "Памятная записка Заместителя Патриаршего Местоблюстителя митрополита Нижегородского Сергия о нуждах Православной Патриаршей Церкви в СССР (19.2.1930)."

collectivization grew steadily before winter 1929-1930.⁸⁷

In order to save the 1930 harvest, Stalin spoke over the heads of his party officials and addressed the peasantry directly, declaring that he did not agree with the careless tempo of his own volunteers and apparatchiks. Stalin's *démarche* also had a perturbing effect on the Soviet religious policy as one of the matters Stalin criticized in his article was the over-zealous drive in Soviet religious policy. He mocked those "rrrevolutionaries" – with a triple r – who organized collective agriculture in order to confiscate church bells.⁸⁸

The above voice was "the master's voice" and the Central Committee was quick to respond: in its resolution of 14 March 1930 it condemned all haste in the closing down of churches. Just as in Stalin's "Dizzy with Success" those, who were to be blamed for "excesses" were local party organs, who were advised to stop the "administrative" closure of churches, usually "disguised under the general will of the local people."⁸⁹ Suddenly Soviet newspapers and

87 See Radzinsky 1997, 265–266.

88 "...Я уже не говорю о тех, с позволения сказать, "революционерах", которые дело организации артели начинают со снятия с церковей колоколов. Снять колокола - подумаешь какая рреволюционность." SS 12, 198. "Головокружение от успехов. К вопросам колхозного движения."

89 "...Наконец, ЦК считает необходимым отметить совершенно недопустимые искривления партийной линии в области борьбы с религиозными предрассудками, так же как и в области товарооборота между городом и деревней. Мы имеем в виду административное закрытие церковей без согласия подавляющего большинства села, ведущее обычно к усилению религиозных предрассудков...ЦК считает, что дальнейший рост колхозного движения и ликвидация кулачества как класса невозможны без немедленной ликвидации этих искривлений...Решительно прекратить практику закрытия церковей в административном порядке, фактивно прикрываемую общественно-добровольным желанием населения. Допускать закрытие церковей лишь в случае действительного желания подавляющего большинства крестьян и не иначе, как с утверждения постановлений сходов областными исполкомами. За издевательские выходки в отношении религиозных чувств крестьян и крестьянок привлекать виновных к строжайшей ответственности." KPSSvr IV, 396-397. "Постановление ЦК ВКП (б) о борьбе с искривлениями партлинии в колхозном движении 14 марта 1930 г." See also Pravda, 15 March 1930, No. 73 (4518) "О борьбе с искривлениями партлинии в колхозном движении. Всем ЦК нацреспублик, всем крайевым, областным, окружным и районным комитетам партии." This new policy towards religious matters was seen in the decision of Politburo on 25 March 1930. The Politburo had decided to organize demonstrations against these international protests (in the Soviet Union and abroad) but stressed in its resolutions that these demonstrations should anyhow employ aggressive slogans ("против

all political figures were adapting themselves to this volte-face of Stalin. First to show its loyalty to their master's voice was, of course, the main newspaper *Pravda*, which in its articles started to rehash Stalin's new initiatives. For example, *Pravda* in the same number started to discuss the "excesses" in collectivization.⁹⁰ The Soviet regime suddenly realized that, among other "excesses", spontaneous and hasty actions in the fight against religious "prejudices" had been harmful. In the view of the writer of *Pravda's* article, the "class enemies" and "right opportunists" had been able to utilize these "excesses" for their own ends.⁹¹

However, we detect a slight difference when we compare the massive self-criticism over the "excesses" of collectivization and the

провокаторов. интервенции. против церковных агентов капитала. против папы и архиепископов") take care that there would be no provocations towards religious people. RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 3, d. 780, ll. 12- (Pp 121, 25/3-30).

90 See, *Pravda*, 2 March 1930, No. 60 (4505) "Кто допускает перегибы в отношении середняка. тот помогает кулаку" (See also the vicious caricature made under the pseudonym Deni); *Pravda*, 4 March 1930, No. 62 (4507) "Удар по середняку - удар по коллективизации". "Уроки, которые надо учесть."

91 "...К этому присоединяются еще отдельные факты административного головоуятия в борьбе с религиозными предрассудками. Уже многократно указывалось, что все эти перегибы и искривления являются прямой услугой нашим классовым врагам и водой на мельницу правого оппортунизма." *Pravda*, 12 March 1930, No. 70 (4515). "Закрепить пройденный этап коллективизации. Решительно прекратить искривления." See also how the Oblast Committee in the Leningrad area sent a memo concerning duties in antireligious activity. In it they also draw attention to "excesses" in the antireligious activity. However, the general tone of the memo was that the local officials should pay more attention to their antireligious activity in general. BЛОК, 11 April, 1930 No. 7, 16. "Об очередных задачах антирелигиозной работы. (Постановление Секретариата Обкома ВКП(б) от 19 марта 1930 г)." As an example of this cautious attitude we may examine the case of a certain Slepkov who was condemned in *Pravda*. According to this article, Slepkov had erroneously comprehended religion as being a private matter for workers and that the party fought against religion not only by economic means but also on an ideological front. The message of this article was to stress that religion could not be destroyed by "leftist phrases" that demanded the confiscation of church property. The only communist solution was to expand antireligious work among the workers and peasants. "...У него выходит, что стоит закрыть все церкви и колокола перелить в станки – и дело будет в шляпе. Слепков "забывает", что в нашей стране имеется ряд религиозных сектантских течений, у которых нет ни церквей, ни колоколов, и все же эти течения пока что существуют...Антирелигиозная пропаганда не может и не должна проводиться в порядке "левого" загиба, а в меру развертывания массовой работы среди рабочих в крестьянских масс. *Pravda*, 15 March 1930, No. 73 (4518) "Очередная вылазка тов. Слепкова. Против правого уклона и "левой" фразы."

petty worry over overdrives in antireligious activity. Nevertheless, Stalin's speech was enough to provoke self-criticism; on 14 March 1930 *Pravda* published an exemplary "case" from Ukraine where some "lower organs" had been guilty of "administrative interference in religious matters and the life of the church."⁹² It seems that the apparatchiks reacted to the message contained in Stalin's article by a face-saving solution; the party should condemn both the "right deviation" and "leftist phrases" in its antireligious activity.

Inside the Soviet antireligious movement, "*Dizzy with Success*" proved a veritable bombshell. The *Bezbozhnik* movement suddenly realized that it was regarded as acting against the wishes of the "Vozhd." Actually, this could be regarded as the start of the gradual "withering away" of this movement. Its membership rose to 5.7 million by 1932, but the importance of this organ began to decline simultaneously with the "quiet funeral" of the Cultural Revolution. As we may see, the impact of Stalin's article was enormous; in one sentence he placed under suspicion all antireligious activities of the local organs. The only logical solution seemed to lie in more intensifying work in order to demonstrate the value of the SVB to Soviet society. So in 1932, the Central Council of the *Bezbozhnik* movement declared a 5-year plan to "liquidate" religion and to create a totally atheistic society by 1937. Moreover, the leader of the SVB movement, Yaroslavsky, was also forced to submit to his master's voice and inside the Central Council of the SVB movement he condemned the practise of hastily taking church bells, without any propaganda work having been conducted among the population. The will of the population was supposed to be the decisive factor in this process.⁹³

The new tone of Stalin made the Cult Commission in Moscow

92 *Pravda*, 14 March 1930, No. 72 (4517). "Извращение директив правительства." See also Powell 1978, 31.

93 YIV, 115–116, 118–119 "Доклад на II пленуме ЦК СВБ СССР 20 марта 1930 г." See also YI, 170–171. "Не допускать перегибов в борьбе с религией"; Roslof 1994, 275–276. According to Daniel Peris, it was also the Stalinist homogeneous policy itself which gradually suffocated the SVB movement. "...The homogenizing pall of high Stalinist political culture that had emerged by the early 1930s obviated the need for open, institutional politics as such...religion has been defeated. The League was no longer necessary and quickly collapsed." Peris 1995, 362. However, according to Larry E. Holmes the SVB movement was revitalized during the late 1930s and the membership rose from 2 million (1937) to 3 million by 1941. Holmes 1993, 145–146.

suddenly realize that "local" organs had been guilty of numerous "violations" against Soviet law and that it had an urgent need to "rectify" this activity.⁹⁴ The question of "violations" against Soviet legality were later discussed seriously at the special meeting of the CSCRQ on 6 April 1930 (attending were Smidovich, Krasikov, Pronin, Tuchkov and Vladimirova). At this meeting, the Cult Commission decided to report to the VTsIK Presidium some of the violations made by local officials. According to this list of misdeeds, priests were illegally expelled from towns and villages; this internal exile was usually executed by *raskulachivanie* action. During the "de-kulakization" local officials confiscated the house of an individual priest and expelled his family out of the village. Moreover, the committee called attention to the fact that in some places the servants of cults were automatically expelled to limber camps or priests were put doing hard labour. The CSCRQ summed up this list by remarking that local organs usually imposed "back-breaking taxes" on all servants of cults, thus making their life a misery.⁹⁵

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As a way of stabilizing the situation, the commission proposed that local officials should treat priests as they did other citizens. For example, the commission remarked that officials should not as a rule confiscate the houses of those servants of cults who were not kulaks. Local officials could, officially, freely decide about the social status of priests; whether they were kulaks or not. Usually they were categorized as kulaks. Moreover, internal deportations could be implemented for priests only by recourse to the same procedures as utilized for ordinary citizens. According to the Cult Commission, the whole question of priests should be resolved by creating experimental agricultural "colonies" for those servants of cults, who had given up their duties, and those who did not have any income (priests without a parish). In financial matters local organs should not act independently; taxes on priests should be imposed in accordance with real income and, as a rule, should not exceed 100 percent of their income. Therefore the inspection of the local financing organs in this matter should be given to the official procuracy. Moreover, prayer-

94 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 6. "Цик"ам АССР, крайисполкомам и областкомам НКЮ РСФСР."

95 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 1 (pkvk 9, 6/4 1930).

houses should not be subjected to any "punitive-insurance rates."⁹⁶

From this time on, some of the party bosses inside the VTsIK and the Cult Commission started to make discreet attempts to restrict the "illegal" acts of local officials. As mentioned above, it was Stalins article "Dizzy with success" which inspired these calls about "revolutionary legality" or complaints about "excesses." The term "revolutionary legality" was an example of the famous Bolshevik jargon that could be utilized in the most divergant ways. On the one hand, the hardliners of the Soviet regime comprehended it as an excuse for harsh methods against class enemies. On the other hand, "moderate" Communists understood it as a way of observing "normal" legal forms. It is hard to judge how sincerely this expression was used in the discussion inside the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, in some cases the worry over "revolutionary legality" and local misbehaviour seems have been quite genuine. For example, if we examine the letters of a certain Kotomkin to Georgy (Sergo) Konstantinovich Ordzhonikidze (1886–1937) we find that this high-ranking secretary (the PredVTsIK and the VTsIK) quite frankly revealed the intolerable situation among the clergy. The source of his information came from ordinary people who complained to the head of the state – Kalinin – about the religious persecutions. In his letter Kotomkin revealed that Kalinin had received a myriad of protests in which ordinary people complained (see Table II.2) about the total lack of "revolutionary legality" in relation to lishentsy.⁹⁷

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In this letter Kotomkin listed twenty-six exemplary cases in which the local officials had over-taxed some member of the clergy and when they were not able pay these taxes (money, potatoes, grain, livestock...etc.). As a result of this semi-official blackmail, local

96 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 1 (pkvk 9, 6/4 1930).

97 "...никаких признаков элементарной революционной законности по отношению к ним, как лишенцам, не существует. На местах царит полный произвол и непонимание политики партии в этом политически важном вопросе. Все мероприятия органов местной власти направлены к тому, чтобы заодно с кулаками "раскулачить" и служителей культа. Это незаконное "раскулачивание" производится под видом налогового обложения..." GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 7, rol. 2. "ЦИК, ВКП(б) тов. Орджоникидзе 14/III -30." In 1929 the commission received 5242 complaints and dealt with 5473 cases. Next year the amount of complaints increased to 17 637 cases. In 1931 the commission received 12 350 complaints from Soviet citizens. See GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 43. "Цифровые сведения о жалобах и переписке, поступившей по вопросам, связанным с культами за 1924–1934 г.г..."

officials had imprisoned these priests and sentenced them to internal exile and, as a rule, the security organs had confirmed these sentences. Kotomkin's letter is a revealing document; it clearly shows how the VTsIK and its officials were totally unable to control the situation in the provinces. For instance, when the VTsIK insisted on having an explanation from below, the local officials could easily defend themselves and their policy of closing the churches. They only claimed, as a certain Goryatsev did, that local Soviet officials were surrounded by hostile enemies – *lishentsy* – constituted 20% of the population of that particular place. Moreover, it was the masses of the local population, as Goryatsev stated in his reply to higher organs, that had actually demanded the closing down of churches.⁹⁸

As a result of its meeting dealing with these "excesses", the VTsIK announced on 20 May 1930 a declaration to the all TsIK's in the autonomous Soviet republics, krais, and oblasts in which the local organs were blamed for many violations such as the illegal confiscations of churches, over-taxation of religious premises and clergy, restricting the right to live wherever one wanted and all sorts of violations of "revolutionary legality." However, official worry over the mistreatment of the servants of cults seemed to have been limited to maintaining appearances. For example, when the VTsIK demanded that local officials should not let *raskulachivanie* servants of cults and their family-members settle down in public places, such as squares and municipal buildings lest their poor plight cause a scandal. The Soviet regime was apparently worried over the impact of wandering destitute families of priests. Moreover, according to the VTsIK, these people could not join cooperative farms. As a final accolade the VTsIK announced that local officials should not allow anything to happen that could hurt the feelings of believers. This quite inconsistent administrative order was signed by Kalinin, the secretary of the VTsIK, A.S. Kiselev (1879–1938) and a consultant of the CSCRQ, Vorobev.⁹⁹

98 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 7, rol. 2. See especially how local officials defended themselves: GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 7, rol. 2. "Председателю правительственной комиссии по хлебозаготовкам при Совете Труда и Обороны 10/1-30." See also Slavko 1995, 63.

99 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 8. "Центральным исполнительным комитетам автономных республик, краевым и областным исполнительным комитетам." As seen in the instructions given after Stalin's speech, the blame was put on local officials who were seen to be guilty. The instruction demanded: "...немедленному исправлению допущенных местными

The real impact of "*Dizzy with success*" proved of short duration; although party officials paid lip-service to "excesses", the wave of collectivization was already under way. Quite soon afterwards Stalin made intimations that his article "*Dizzy with success*" only had a tactical value; in June 1930 Stalin himself praised the achievements of collectivization¹⁰⁰ and in 1931–1932 masses of peasants were forced back to *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes*. As time went by, the local officials realized that Stalin's article had been a mere manoeuvre and the Soviet regime was bent on total collectivization. Consequently, the calls for a more moderate religious policy and "revolutionary legality" proved futile and the Cult Commission was obliged to repeat its powerless protests against local excesses.¹⁰¹

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The outcome of this short-lived détente was a spate of re-openings of churches. As we can detect from the documents, the decision to re-open churches did not come easily; in its first meeting on 26 March 1930, the CSCRQ had a lengthy discussion concerning this matter. In the official protocol, the whole discussion was dealt with by a short remark that there had been some "argumentative questions" when dealing with the matter. However, the Cult Commission had to pay attention to this new line and in its next meeting on 26 July 1930 it decided to re-open 12 churches. This wave of re-openings continued but gradually the CSCRQ also began to give more negative answers. For example, at its meeting on 16 September 1930, the Cult Commission decided to give permission to open 19 churches and to close 9 churches and one synagogue.¹⁰²

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- органами нарушений." See GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 6 "ЦИК"ам АССР, крайисполкомам и облисполкомам, НКЮ РСФСР." See also RPTsKG, 294.
- 100 SS 12, 261–262, 280–290. "Политический отчёт Центрального Комитета XVI съезду ВКП(б)." For the sake of interest, see how the Trotskyite opposition in exile commented on the events of the early 1930s and Stalin's letter "Dizzy with Success." Stalin's letter was viewed as "a capitulation" in "the face of bourgeois pressure." See BO 1930, No.11, 34–35. See also the reaction of the Orthodox émigré, Maslov 1937, 121–122.
- 101 The local officials realized quite soon that Stalin's speech had been a manoeuvre in order to save the harvest and before Christmas 1930 the local officials were busy in planning anti-Christmas campaigns. See BЛОК, 20 December, 1930, No. 26, 11. "О проведении антирождественской кампании (Постановление секретариата Областкома ВКП(б) от 8/XII-30 г.)"
- 102 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 1. (pkvk 10, 26/3, 1930); (pkvk 11, 26/7 -3930); (pkvk 13, 16/9-1930). As time went by the amount of negative answers increased; on 16 May 1931, the commission gave permission to open 6 churches and ordered 37 others to be closed. In June 1931, the commission gave permission to open

As a matter of fact, Stalin's article only caused a brief interlude in the frontal attack against the religious organizations in the USSR. At the same time the practice of looting church bells continued with a gradual tempo and even the VTsIK and CSCRQ were obliged to give a "categorical order" that church bells should be confiscated only from those churches that had been restricted from ringing bells.¹⁰³

As a result of this letter, Soviet officials attempted to avoid the most obvious forms of harassing religious organizations. The basic attitude was, anyhow, the same – to exploit churches and gradually liquidate religious organizations. This more refined attitude was put to the test when local officials invented a new method of control: the re-registration of parishes. This was, of course, a hidden threat against churches. On the one hand, the Soviet regime was eager to know how much it could confiscate from religious organizations and organized an inventory of ecclesiastical property. On the other hand, by means of tight registration formalities, the government was able to liquidate a certain percentage of the parishes and confiscate their property at once. This new policy was also discussed in the orders given to local inspectors in Leningrad on 27 November 1931; these officials were supposed to concentrate on compiling an inventory of ecclesiastical property, on re-registration of contracts with parishes, supervision of these parishes and, interestingly enough, supporting Renovatist parishes "within the limits of the law."¹⁰⁴

However, when examining the general situation, we may say that Stalin's lip service to "revolutionary legality" also had a more solid impact on Soviet religious policy. The central organs now had a weapon against the autonomous actions of local officials. Especially the local Soviet security and judicial organs did not want to comply with orders coming from the VTsIK or the CSCRQ. The burning

20 churches and at the same time closed 35 others. See GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 9. (pkvk 5, 16/5-31); GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 9, (pkvk 6, 16/6-31). According to Sheila Fitzpatrick: "...for a number of years after savage onslaught against religion of 1929-30 and its abrupt halt, the states policy towards rural priests and believers was relatively tolerant." Fitzpatrick 1994, 210.

103 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 14, fol. 2. "Постоянной комиссии по вопросам культов при Президиуме ВЦИК 4 декабря 1931."

104 TsGA SPb f. 1000, op. 48, d. 77, l. 123. "Всем начальникам горрайадминисотделов и заводов, райадминнадзора Ленинградской области 11.1.1931"; TsGA SPb f. 1000, op. 48, d. 77, ll. 188 "Протокол Но.4. Совещания инспекторов культов г. Ленинграда от 27/X -31 г.." See also the situation in Moscow in the early 1930s, see Shimotomai 1991, 4.

question was: how to execute the policy of the central organs, how to control the periphery which was conducting its own policy?

This was also realized by the Cult Commission when at its meeting on 19 February 1932 it acknowledged the prevailing contradictory situation. The CSCRQ had realized that the local organs were not complying with the VTsIK's circular dated 20 April 1930. The commission comprehended suddenly (just as Sergii had stressed in his private protest against the prevailing religious political situation) that there were too few impartial local officials dealing with this matter. As the commission put it, there existed "improper behaviour by local judicial organs" when dealing with religious organizations. Therefore the Cult Commission required "second instances" to deal with matters related to religious organizations and servants of cults.¹⁰⁵

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Moreover, during the next meeting on 16 April 1932 the Cult Commission listed more detailed "errors" such as "nonformality" (неоформленность) and the "weak implementation of established legal standards" (слабое выполнение установленных законом норм) when liquidating prayer houses. The commission finally decided that there was a need to stipulate new laws which should regulate this problem.¹⁰⁶

The problem, however, was that the Cult Commission had no means to enforce its resolutions or demands for more "revolutionary legality." At first, the Soviet regime had tried, as we have seen above, to consolidate the position of the CSCRQ by legal actions; by officially regulating the position, the goals and missions of the CSCRQ from the central commission to the grass-roots level.¹⁰⁷ The main problem, however, remained: how to handle local officials. The first proposal with respect to handling such local officials was initiated by the secretariat of the VTsIK on 9 June 1932. Their solution was to organize an inspection of the local situation – this secret proposition written by the secretary of the VTsIK Novikov, stressed that the Cult Commission should conduct an inspection inside local regions and later inform the fraction of the leading party working in the Presidium

105 "...признать, что судебная практика на местах вплоть до судов второй инстанции по отношению к делам служителей культа и религиозных обществ идет в значительной степени в нарушение циркуляра Президиума 20.4.1930." GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 15 (pkvk 1, 19/2, 1932).

106 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 15 (pkvk 2, 16/4, 1932).

107 SURc, No. 27. 15 June 1931, 357–360. See published instructions concerning the duties and structures of the CSCRQ, see ZOK, 108–125, 126–130.

of the VTsIK on the facts which contradicted the "line of the party and the state" in this matter.¹⁰⁸

However, it seems that local officials had also more "concrete" reasons to persecute religious organizations. The local Soviet organs had always a chronic lack of money and it led the locals to squeeze money from religious organizations. This practice was both ideologically acceptable and it appeared that demanding taxes of all kinds from priests and believers turned out to be a profitable business. The local Cult Commissions could do little when facing the "local mafia." All they could do, as a certain circular to the Leningrad *rik* reveals, was to send letters of warning and orders to stop this kind of behaviour. In any event, as a following circular put it, the local officials just "loved" religious celebrations in order to be able to blackmail believers.¹⁰⁹

The decision to gain information and supervise the activity of local officials guided the religious political practices of the Cult Commission in 1929-1932. In order to fight against the excesses of local officials and to reclaim its authority in the Soviet religious policy, the CSCSRQ needed basic information on the prevailing situation in the provinces. Earlier the only source of information had been the material coming from the VTsIK, from the protests and petitions of religious organizations to president Kalinin. Now the commission wanted to obtain information straight from the provinces.¹¹⁰

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108 "...Предложить комиссии по культам произвести на месте расследование фактов извращения линии партии и правительства по данному вопросу и внести на рассмотрение фракции ВКП(б) Президиума ВЦИК доклад о деятельности местных органов с вызовом представителей отдельных местных органов, которыми были допущены наибольшие нарушения законодательства о культах." GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 6. "Выписка из секретного приложения к протоколу № 29 Совещания Секретаря ВЦИК с его заместителями от 9 июня 1932 года."

109 TsGA SPb f.1000, op.48, d. 77a, l. 53. "Всем рикам и горсоветам Ленинградской области и инспекторам по делам религиозных культов при райсоветах г. Ленинграда. Циркулярно."

110 The local CSCSRQ was always dependent on other organs. For example, the actual "dirty work" of the party's antireligious activity in Leningrad was executed by special military units under the GPU. TsGA SPb f. 1000, op.51, d. 27. See also Shinkarchuk 1995, 73. In 1931 the Cult Section of the NKVD was fused with the CSCSRQ. GARF f. 1235, op. 73, d. 1649, rol.1 (pkvk 18, 16/1-31); GAFR f. 5263, op. 1, d. 9. (pkvk 18, 16/1 1931). The intention of this act was to consolidate the position of the CSCSRQ in Moscow and strengthen its authority in regard to local officials. GARF f. 1235, op. 76, d.21 "Постановление Президиума

Summing up the activity of the Cult Commission during the years 1929–1932, it is captivating to realize that although the Cult Commission had rather limited powers to decide the outlines of Soviet religious policy, it played a substantial role, as mentioned above, as a court of appeal between the demands of local militant atheists and local believers. As a matter of fact, decisions to close or open churches constituted one of the few things this commission could take care of quite independently. When investigating the piles of *delo*'s coming from this organ, one has to conclude that decisions to close churches or to open them seem to have constituted the real battlefield of the CSCRQ. In this work the Cult Commission was compelled to vacillate between the demands of militant atheists – of those who were for closing all churches – as well as deal with complaints coming from local believers who appealed to the VTsIK. Moreover, the documents of this organ are filled with demands for more "revolutionary legality" and fewer "spontaneous" acts from local party officials, a fact which clearly contradicts the belief that the religious policy of the early 1930s and the policy of the CSCRQ were conducted in a spirit of total destruction. On the contrary, there is evidence that indicate that the opposite was the case. The pressure from below and the pressure from abroad did, as a matter of fact, have an effect on the religious policy of the Soviet state. Even the sudden change of direction in Stalin's religious political initiatives such as his article "Dizzy with Success" were partly initiated by foreign reactions to Soviet campaigns.

According to Terry D. Martin, the Cult Commission was in general trying to appease religion. He characterizes the role of the CSCRQ as a great appeaser working on behalf of the Soviet proletariat; trying to build up a *détente* between the Communist system and the needs of the Soviet people. According to Martin..."they [the protocols of the CSCRQ meetings] reveal that the commission virtually never attempted to increase religious persecutions on any issue, but rather at almost every meeting attempted in some way to alleviate it." Martin has stressed that this was partly because the Soviet state wanted to

Всероссийского Центрального Исполнительного Комитета об утверждении Положения о постоянной Центральной и местных комиссиях по рассмотрению религиозных вопросов 30 мая 1931." See also GARF f. 1235, op. 76, d.21, l. 21 "О постоянной центральной и местных комиссиях по рассмотрению вопросов культов."

preserve its "friendly" image among the population.¹¹¹ Perhaps this was the case, but nonetheless, it seems that Martin is overestimating the appeasing nature of the Cult Commission in its role as an instrument of Soviet religious policy. According to documentary material it seems that the Cult Commission was trying to follow the general line of the party and that this commission was against a "voluntary" and "anarchist" religious policy and for a coordinated religious policy.

Gradually the tide turned against the "interventionists" in Soviet religious policy. The bureaucracy inside the Cult Commission and VTsIK could now start to collect the data and regulate the activities of local officials by sending their own men and women to the provinces and making their own inspections when the turmoil of the early 1930s was calmed down. The period of the "good years" of the 1930s was now ahead.

111 Martin 1995b, 146.

III The years of stabilization and consolidation of the committee's position (1933–1935)

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1. The "good years" of the 1930s and the ambivalent relaxation of antireligious campaigns

As described by Professor Nicholas Timaseff, Soviet society experienced its second set-back – a kind of strategic retreat – in the early and mid-1930s. This should, of course, only be interpreted as Timaseff's personal opinion, which he expressed in the heat of the battles of the World War II. In Timaseff's view, Soviet Communism was obliged to recognize its failures in the battle against the old society and capitalism. It was the idea of communism that had gone bankrupt when the first *pyatiletka* appeared to be a "grotesque delusion." For Timaseff this had been the fatal moment for Soviet rule; from that time onward, the Soviet system was forced to accept more and more ideological concessions that would inevitably lead to a restoration of capitalism in Russia.¹

Timaseff's views were taken seriously during his time. We are also, of course, entitled to argue whether he was correct or not. However, the undeniable fact remains that there was, indeed, a substantial

1 Timaseff 1943, 150–156.

change in the ideological atmosphere in the Soviet Union after the Cultural Revolution. This so-called "Great Retreat", which Timaseff mentioned, coincided with the "good years" of the 1930s.²

The background of this change is obvious: the dreadful ghost of famine was nearly gone in 1934. Furthermore, Soviet industry was recovering. As a matter of fact, even collectivized agriculture was slowly convalescing after the turmoil of the years 1929-1931. Ironically, the change in the ideological atmosphere coincided with the partial retreat towards traditional values.

The escape to old traditions was apparent everywhere in the Soviet society. Gradually, the harassment and baiting of bourgeoisie specialists, so-called *spetsedstvo*, was a diminishing phenomenon.³ Moreover, the Soviet "sexual Thermidor" coincided with more conservative family life, school curricula were reshaped together with the adoption of school uniforms. In addition, certain old "bourgeois" features, such as dance halls, reappeared in Moscow. Moreover, in the mid-1930s, Soviet high art, cinema and theatre gradually adopted a new appreciative approach towards the "positive features" of old Russian culture.⁴

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Nevertheless, in the middle of this lovely idyll, Stalin was already planning his next step towards total dictatorship. The détente during the 1930s was a delusive phantom - the master himself was devising a plan for total revenge in order to settle his scores with his own party. In public, nevertheless, everything seemed to be normal: the Soviet mass media were exuberantly celebrating Stakhanovism, heroic polar explorers, and highlighting new joyous victories in the Soviet economy. Even so the mood of public joy and overflowing optimism of the Communist party were only one part of the picture. On the one hand, the Vozhd himself seemed to be promising better times to his people when he declared in 1935 that "life's getting better, life's

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- 2 See, N.S. Timaseff: *The Great Retreat*. New York. 1946. According to Jerry F. Hough, the term itself, Great Retreat, is somewhat ambiguous and Western commentators have not been able to shed light on the more significant questions such as "retreat from what?." See Hough 1984, 242-243. On the changes in the political culture and atmosphere from the Cultural Revolution until the 1930s, see Fitzpatrick 1984b, 153-154; Barber 1990, 9-10. See also VOG, 15 November, 1935, No. 29. "Эволюционирует ли Советская Власть?"
- 3 Joravsky 1961, 135-136; Lewin 1984, 57, 67-70.
- 4 Stites 1990b, 386-391; Stites 1992, 72-78, 94-97; Andrie 1994, 204-205; Khlevnyuk 1996, 106-107. See also Medvedev 1984, 205-206.

getting happier" ("жить стало лучше, жить стало веселей!"). On the other hand, to begin with, Stalin was silently getting rid of his former allies in the Cultural Revolution. These overly ardent communists, interestingly enough, after a few years of heroic campaigns, were removed in the first significant party purge of 1932–33, so-called *chistka*. These vigilantes – communists of worker-peasant origin – who had shone in the collectivization and industrialization campaigns, were usually simply expelled from the ranks of the party. This rather lenient "cleansing" was accomplished by withdrawing party membership cards (so-called *proverka*) from the "unworthy." From now on, this new wave of cleansing the party was enforced by the actions of the security organs, which, according to this new policy, were reorganized and renamed. The old OGPU was abolished and absorbed into the new NKVD, which, at first, took a more civilian outlook than its revolutionary predecessors. In actual fact, during the years 1933–1936 Soviet officials were energetically imposing limitations on the NKVD. In order to protect individual rights, the *troiki*, three-person field courts, were disbanded in 1934. Soviet society as a whole seemed to be moving towards regular judicial procedures. It is interesting to note that everything took place under the new slogans of the mid-1930s; these new demands of the party were expressed as an urge to be "cultured" (культурный быт).⁵

The mastermind of this new volte-face was, as in the case of earlier sudden changes of policy, Stalin himself. He and his close colleagues, after the era of ideology (1928–1931) were now starting to favour more traditional Great-Russian values in music, literature, education, newspapers. However, the logic of the one-party system required a constant warfare against potential enemies: purges inside the ruling party and the supervision of subordinated people. So, as a consequence of the Stalinism, the breathing-spell of "the good years", 1933–1935, proved to be only a short interlude.

Stalin's political motivation was simple: he wanted to consolidate his own power by means of a new détente. In one sense, Stalin's

5 See, for example, Pravda 20 February, 1932 No. 50 (5215). "Культурно-массовую работу в бригады, на участки." See also Fitzpatrick 1984b, 146–153; Geldern & Stites 1995, 237–243; Khlevnyuk 1996, 129–132; Thurston 1996, 2–4; Bergman 1997, 57–92. For official purges of the party, in which over 1.6 million people were expelled from the party, see Schröder 1992, 166–167. For Western evaluations on the role of the culture during the communist revolutions, see Meyer 1972, 360–367.

position was indeed firmer than ever. In the early 1930s the victories of collectivization and industrialization seemed to be complete with the political apotheosis of Stalin. The XVII party congress, "the congress of victors", which took place in 1934, officially constituted Stalin's triumph. However, this façade of Stalinist unity and the general optimistic mood hid the possibility of quiet rebellion inside the party. In the middle of the XVII congress – nearly simultaneously with the lofty accolades to the great Gensec – certain local party bosses made a cautious attempt to dethrone Stalin.⁶

According to rumours, which historians have usually repeated without any clear evidence, some of the old party cadres had contemplated overthrowing Stalin and replacing him with S.M. Kirov (1886-1934), the party leader from the Leningrad area. Moreover, according to some observers, when voting for a new Central Committee, at least 166 delegates out of 1225 crossed out Stalin's name. Consequently, this nameless opposition and the quiet discussions previously mentioned were enough to embitter Stalin in the middle of his triumph and, as some historians have claimed, this filled him with a desire for revenge.⁷

Nonetheless, in public, the exultant tones of the XVII congress seemed to imply that a lengthy period of political détente should prevail. All signs were promising: ex-oppositionists were allowed to work inside the party and in July 1934, as a gesture of liberalization, the notorious OGPU was replaced by a new security organ – the All Union NKVD under the leadership of G.G. Yagoda (1891–1938).

This mild détente was also apparent in relation to religion. When reading the main Soviet newspapers, such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* one cannot help noticing that the number of antireligious articles diminished greatly after 1932. Henceforth, it was only occasionally that these newspapers published some short notices about harmful manifestations of religion. Compared with the massive piles of antireligious articles of the early 1930s, this change is quite significant.⁸

6 Conquest 1993, 178.

7 Conquest 1993, 177–178. For the opposition against Stalin, see NR, 74–101. See Thurston's critical evaluation on missing voting ballots and the conspiracy created by Stalin. Thurston 1996, 20–23.

8 For some occasional notices and "horror stories" concerning religion (a priest had led a league of thieves, a teacher with a religious background had caused the suicide of a child, etc.) see *Pravda*, 12 February 1935, No. 42(6288) "Пон во

The relative relaxation is obvious from the records of the XVII congress, where the delegates hardly ever mention religion or antireligious work. The ideological warfare against this enemy was not in full swing any more. Only Yaroslavsky drew the attention of the party members to Soviet religious policy and maintained that the party should not be too confident on overcoming religion. The class struggle and the fight against religion should actually now coincide. As Yaroslavsky stated...

..But it would not be right to relax because we have put an end to religion. Comrade Stalin has warned us against such false rejoicing and serenity that originate from ideas like "we have entered a classless society, which means that we may ease down the class war", or that "we must put down our weapons and go to take a nap while waiting for the emergence of the classless society."⁹

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Religion was, according to Yaroslavsky, liquidated not by waiting but by fighting, because...

..religion and religious organizations are up to this moment a risk for the working class and peasantry, they have concealed the surviving remnants of the capitalist elements (in our society) nurturing their ideology. To root out and cast out all the relics in the economy and in the consciousness of people is impossible without rooting out religious ideology which is not less vivid than nationalistic ideology and has concealed a whole package of counter-revolutionary organizations."¹⁰

In fact, this citation of Yaroslavsky's illustrates the basic dilemma of the Soviet religious policy during the "good years" of the 1930s; the partial relaxation in matters of religion, such as the whole interlude of 1933–1935, was in actual fact partly an illusion. On the one hand, the Stalinist leadership wanted to consolidate its political mandate

главе шайки грабителей"; Pravda, 15 February 1935, No. 45(6291) "Божья мать"; Pravda, 24 February 1935, No. 54(6300) "Самоубийство школьника"; Pravda, 11 April 1935, No. 100(6346) "О браконьерах. селедке и попе"; Pravda, 13 April 1935, No. 102(6348) "С попом в союзе"; Pravda, 28 June 1935, No. 176(6422) "Зверская расправа."

9 SXVII, 297.

10 SXVII, 297–298.

among the ordinary people and favoured a more moderate policy in relation to old traditional values. On the other hand, the Soviet regime was gradually tightening its political grip on newly established collective farms, factories and plants. Moreover, the machine of terror that had been launched at the beginning of the 1930s continued its search for the enemies of the people. As a matter of fact, during 1933–1935 the Soviet security apparatus was increasingly discovering new "nests of sabotage." Together with a more intense quest for suspected terrorists, the security apparatus was gathering evidence and in nearly every newspaper announcements appeared of trials against some new "enemies of the people or terrorist formations." These usual enemies, kulaks and lishentsy, had been wiped out at the beginning of the 1930s and the Russian peasantry suffered a fatal blow together with the ROC. On the other hand, it may be stated that the Russian peasantry was able to maintain many aspects of its traditional religious roots even in kolkhozes. For example, as a lengthy article in the newspaper *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, written by M. Sheinman testifies that religion had not vanished from the collectivized countryside. The Soviet officials knew well that this "relic" was too stubborn to wither away. Nonetheless, the general tone of the party ideologists was that the decisions made in 1929–1932 had been basically correct and that the collectivization had destroyed the kulak roots in the countryside, shattering the social roots of religion there. Nevertheless, according to Sheinman's, the remnants of the kulaks were able to entice ordinary peasants to religion. Moreover, the problem was that churches and sectarians were hiding themselves behind "communist forms of slogans and language." To sum up, Sheinman was convinced that organizing more "Soviet festivals" instead of "ecclesiastical ones" would remove old habits and harmful traditions.¹¹

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The Bolshevik mistrust over the uncontrollable spirit of the so-called "dark masses" (peasantry) and the worry over the "weak ones" (women) was considered one of the main problems in Soviet religious policy. Consequently, the cadres of antireligious activity were also engaged in a never-ending fight against to "dark masses" (темные массы). Yaroslavsky, for example, acknowledged once that one-third of the trade union women were believers. According to him,

11 PZM 1936, No. 4, 79-89. "Религиозные пережитки в колхозной деревне."

the Soviet regime should be patient with them and guide them towards atheism by means of education. However, the fight against religion itself should be merciless because "hostile" elements utilized religion to mask their real objectives of "wrecking" and "sabotage." Therefore Communists should fight mercilessly against religion and against those with "opportunistic" ideas.¹² Worry over "the dark forces" was often expressed elsewhere in the Soviet newspapers during the 1930s. Soviet ideologists were rehashing the fear that the enemy would utilize the weak spots of Soviet society: peasantry and women. This "dilemma of the weak ones" was also the favourite stereotype discussed in the antireligious newspapers and publications during the mid-1930s. For example, during the XVII party congress, some delegates were more than anxious to maintain that the "enemy" was actually utilizing religion ("остатками темноты и религиозными предрассудками") in order to entice women to fight against the Soviet power.¹³

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Although during the mid-1930s Soviet society was retreating towards traditional values, this did not save the Russian peasants. The tide was inescapably against the traditional Russian peasantry. The last remnants of the private farmers were destroyed during these years, and the fight against kulaks, nationalists, priests, and other "enemies" was harsher than ever. Also, the Soviet trade unions were busy purging "alien elements" from their ranks.¹⁴ The activity of these evil enemies was highlighted against the heroic activity of Stalin himself. He now emerged as the sole "organizer of victory" and his cult of personality was now approaching its zenith.¹⁵

12 SPS IX, 296–297 "Речь тов. Ярославского."

13 SXVII, 640. "Речь тов. Шабуровой." See also how a certain female representative, Kasatkina, criticized trade unions for allowing workers with religious convictions to celebrate their religious feasts. SPS IX, 531.

14 See how the officials were worried that kulaks or other elements would "crawl back" to newly established kolkhozes." Pravda 31 January 1933, No. 30 (5556) "О задачах борьбы в колхозах с остатками кулачества." See also how in the ranks of Ukrainian nationalists there were "dozens of kulaks, priests, and petlyurian officers." Pravda, 27 April 1933, No. 116 (5642) "Так орудовали буржуазные националисты." See how the newspaper Pravda starts to utilize systematically the notorious expression "the enemy of the people" (враг народа) as a term referring to those prosecuted in trials. Pravda, 12 July 1933, No. 190 (5716); Pravda, 13 July 1933, No. 191 (5716). This expression was mentioned in No. 87 but in a more normal way than in the last two numbers. See also stenographic accounts from the protocols of the IX Congress, see SPS, 67. "Доклад тов. Шверника."

15 See Pravda, 13 January 1933, No. 13 (5539) "Цели и задачи политических

This ambivalent situation of synchronous relaxation and tightening was also visible in the sphere of Soviet religious policy; the total amount of protests coming from believers to the CSCRQ was clearly diminishing during 1933–1935. However, we may claim with good reason that this reduction in petitions could also be evidence of frustration among the believers – that there was no sense in complaining, if the government was determined to crush the church and all those who protested. Moreover, the local administration and local CSCRQ grass-roots commissions went to great lengths to ensure that religion could not revitalize itself.¹⁶ As archival documents point out, local officials were usually keenly taking care that neither parishes nor priests could collect any money.¹⁷

The historical paradox was, that in the mid-1930s there was a substantial emphasis on returning to more normal procedures in the Soviet judicial system. The practice of "administrative order" was condemned by higher officials in Moscow. For example, when A.Y. Vyshinsky (1883–1954), the notorious prosecutor of the Great Trials, gained a reputation of being almost an advocate of Western liberalism in the mid-1930s, when he tried to restrict the extraordinary powers of the Soviet security institutions. As Robert W. Thurston has remarked, at that time Vyshinsky propagated for use of the term "objective evidence" in the Soviet judicial system.¹⁸ Moreover, the return to traditional values and the tide of decreasing antireligious fervour could also be detected in the activity of the SVB movement;

отделов МТС и совхозов"; Pravda, 16 January 1933, No. 16 (5542) "Новые крепости социализма в деревне." For the publicity, Stalin's speech received, see Pravda, 17 January 1933, No. 17 (5543) "О работе в деревне. Речь тов. Сталина на Объединенном пленуме ЦК и ЦКК ВКП(б). 11 января 1933 года." For the calls for a more militant and aggressive attitude against "religion", "enemies" and "capitalism", see Pravda, 1 January 1933, No. 1 (5527). "На пороге 1933 года."

16 For activities of local CSCRQ commissions in St. Petersburg, see for example TsGA SPb f. 7384, op.33, d. 112, l. 2. "Протокол No.1 Совещания инспекторов по вопросам культов от райсоветов г. Ленинграда и пригородного р-на в Админнадзоре при облисполкоме и Ленсовете от 21 марта 1935 года."

17 See also TsGA SPb f. 7384, op. 33, d. 112, l. 44. "Всем инспекторам по вопросам культов при райсоветах г. Ленинграда." See also RPTsKG, 306–309. "Докладная записка о состоянии религиозных организаций в СССР. отношения их к проекту новой конституции. работа комиссии культов ЦИК СССР и практике проведения законодательства о религиозных культах."

18 Thurston 1996, 5–8.

its membership was now starting to decline dramatically and many SVB cells in the countryside suffered from a "lack of spirit" and "bureaucratic forms of work." These problems were clearly realized afterwards – i.e., during the IV plenum of the SVB Central Council in 1938 the main lecturer, P. Kashirin, acknowledged that the years 1931-1938 could be characterized as the period of great "weakenings in the antireligious work and total disintegration of the SVB work."¹⁹

This contradictory situation can be observed in the activity of the Cult Commission and in the official bilateral consultation held on 28 October 1935 with the Soviet judicial organs. On the one hand, the official resolution of this meeting stressed the fact that the Soviet power had gained "colossal successes" in "getting rid of religion among the population." On the other hand, it acknowledged that it had recently suffered substantial losses "in the field of social policy, culture and enlightenment, especially amongst the most backward part of the population."²⁰

The main emphasis of the Cult Commission was on restricting the activities of the most ardent local organizations. Nevertheless, the CSCRQ was obliged to pay lip service to the general atmosphere of the 1930s, and in its meetings the Cult Commission in Moscow underlined the importance of the fight against "counter-revolutionaries", who were consolidating their position inside the religious organizations.

19 See, PZM 1938, No. 3, 146-147. "О работе IV пленума Центрального совета Союза воинствующих безбожников"; Pravda, 14 August, 1937, No. 223(7189) "2000 бездействующих безбожников"; Pravda, 30 September, 1937, No. 270(7238) "Усилить антирелигиозную пропаганду." Pravda. 2 February 1938, No. 32(7357) "Пленум Центрального Совета Союза Безбожников." The problem was crystallized in the basic question: how to not practise "dry" antireligious propaganda. For how the SVB movement organized competitions for better antireligious textbooks "uchebniks", see Pravda 11 February 1933, No. 41 (5567).

20 "...признать, что в последнее время наблюдается ослабление общественно-политической и культурно-просветительной антирелигиозной работы, особенно среди отсталых слоёв населения." GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 23. "Протокол совместного заседания Правительственной Комиссии и Комиссии по Вопросам Культур при Президиуме ЦИК Союза С.С.Р. 28-го октября 1935 г.."

2. Lack of information and lack of centralized religious policy

The main worry of the Cult Commission was, accordingly, that it was dependent on the VTsIK for information about the situation in the provinces. The need for information was acute at that time; after the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the Soviet regime in Moscow was anxious to tighten its grip on the surrounding provinces and party organizations. This need for genuine information can clearly be seen from the pages of *Pravda* or *Izvestya*; as a sign of a new era, the battle cries of the Cultural Revolution were exchanged in 1932 for exhortations to enforce party discipline and for calls to improve the party organization in new factories and kolkhoses.²¹ By liquidating the *okrug* level administration, the Soviet regime was even trying to intensify the hold on the party organization on individual kolkhoses.²²

Earlier, the will of Moscow was usually enforced by sending special emissaries to remote areas in order to bring local organizations into line. The principle of "democratic centralism" was applied here; the Central Committee possessed a "right to veto the decisions of the local organizations which interfered with the proper conditions of Party and Soviet work." Moreover, local party officials were also obliged to report regularly to Moscow, and if necessary, they were obliged to give oral accounts of their activities. Those local party officials reluctant to obey were usually purged or removed from their posts.²³

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- 21 See the extensive article of I. Vareikis in *Pravda* in which he urges enforcing "concrete leadership" in the party and the fight against *самотек*: *Pravda*, 31 January 1931 No. 360. (5165) "О некоторых организационных задачах и характере партийного руководства." This theme was underlined also by L.M. Kaganovich in his speech in the Moscow area party organizations in January 1932. See *Pravda*, 28 January, 1932, No. 27 (5192) "Вопросы внутрипартийной жизни." See also *Pravda*, 13 January 1932, No. 13 (5178). "Конкретно руководить перестройкой работы зерносовхозов" and *Pravda*, 14 February, 1932 No. 44 (5209) "Народнохозяйственный план 1932 г. и задачи ЦКК - РКИ. Резолюция IV пленума ЦКК ВКП(б) от 10 февраля 1932 г. по докладу тов. Я.Э. Рудзутака."
- 22 *Pravda*, 17 January 1933, No. 20 (5546) "Об итогах объединённого пленума ЦК и ЦКК ВКП(б). Доклад тов. А.М. Кагановича на Объединённом пленуме Московского областного и городского комитета ВКП(б) совместно с секретарями РК и активами Московской организации 17 января 1933." See also *Pravda*, 25 April 1933, No. 114 (5640) "На ответственной посту."
- 23 Fainsod 1958, 183.

From the beginning of the 1930s, the practice of party discipline had been the same: the leadership of the party usually attempted to restrict local activity ("самостек") or "anarchy" by sending their emissaries to check on and enforce the party discipline. Together with these disciplinary actions, questions of education and propaganda were discussed again and again in the party newspapers. It was obvious that the leadership of the party sincerely hoped to control the situation in the provinces by emphasizing discipline in its ranks.

On account of its small size and limited resources, the Cult Commission in Moscow could not afford to send its own plenipotentiaries to the provinces. However, it tried to enforce its authority by sending official letters of inquiry to local party organizations. In doing so, the Cult Commission was engaged in a hopeless fight against the local bosses and their network of power. The method itself was a simple one: the central Cult Commission circulated strictly formulated instructions on how to implement the will of Moscow. Especially with regard to the question of taxation, the CSCRQ seemed to make a real effort to bring local officials into line. In these letters the local officials received carefully planned questions and answers to resolve the more practical problems. The commission obviously wished to signal that Moscow wanted to stop the most brutal aspects of religious political practices. It seems that the main purpose of these letters was to explain to local officials that the central organs favoured less aggressive taxation than during the Cultural Revolution.²⁴ For example, the Cult Commission wanted to reduce the level of taxation by 25% (from the level of 1928–1929 (at which time it had been nearly 100%) and sent an official circular to all Narkomfins in the USSR (unions, autonomous republics, krais, oblasts) to remind local financial organs of this order. It seems that the CSCRQ made serious attempts to answer the numerous questions coming from the provinces but it had not the personnel or resources to handle these questions.²⁵

The paradox of this situation was, of course, immense. On the one

24 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 27, fol. 1 "Председателю постоянной комиссии по вопросам культов при Президиуме ВЦИК т. П.Г. Смидовичу. 5.1.1934." See also GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 26.

25 See GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 29 "Наркомфинам союзных и автономных республик/край/обл./ финоргправление 27.3.1934." See also GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 34, 35, 36, 37.

hand, the general political situation created by the highest leadership of the party was revolutionary and "illegal." On the other hand, the growth of the Soviet economy and production required more stability and discipline. The solution of the leadership was to adopt a policy of "revolutionary legality." So together with witch-hunting, the Soviet judiciary system was given the responsibility of noting the obvious "excesses" of the collectivization and terror in the countryside. As the secret letter signed by Stalin and Molotov on 8 May 1933 underlined, the actual arrest of enemies of the state was supposed to be the duty of the organs of OGPU and the militia – not a duty of local officials, thus condemning the principle of "first arrest and then investigate." Another secret circular is even more revealing in this sense; the joint letter of the Central Control Commission and RabKrin of 25 May 1933, suggested that local "excesses" and imprisonments had burdened all the judicial organs.²⁶

One way to interpret this schizophrenic situation is to realize that the Soviet government was desperate to distinguish itself as a "people's government." It was eager to identify itself with the people; its basic interests were supposed to be identical with the best of the masses. According to Bolshevik dogma, the general outlines of the party's policy were always good for the people although in details the Soviet regime could make mistakes. The Soviet regime was ready to admit that in some particular cases arrests and accusations had been groundless. Nevertheless, the "excesses" the regime admitted to were always of little significance compared with the flood of terror experienced by the Soviet population. As Oleg Khlevnyuk states...

"The centralized initiation and direction of the terror as a whole does not mean that there were no elements of a spontaneous character. Indeed they existed in all such actions – during the course of collectivization and forcible grain requisitioning in 1932–33, in the so-called struggle against "terrorism" following the murder of Kirov, etc. In the official language these phenomena were referred to as "excesses" (peregib) or as breaches of the socialist legality."²⁷

Therefore it was understandable that the Soviet regime was anxious

26 Fainsod 1958, 185–186.

27 Khlevnyuk 1995, 167.

to grant ordinary peasants and workers the possibility of writing letters, complaints and applications to higher organs. As Merle Fainsod in his splendid account on the Smolensk Archives puts it...

"..The function served by letters in official publications was therefore primarily "educational" or "propagandistic." Through them the regime in effect signalled its people that it was aware of certain types of abuses, and that it was determined to stamp them out. At the same time, it dissociated itself from any responsibility for the abuses, and it provided approved scapegoats on whom the complaints and grievances of an outraged citizenry could vent themselves. The image of itself which the top leadership sought to project thus became one of a somewhat remote but benevolent guardian who interfered to protect his charges from arbitrary behaviour on the part of local satraps who were exceeding their authority."²⁸

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Consequently, the method of sending letters of complaint and appeals to Kalinin in support of the right to religious freedom was the only means whereby believers could react to the local "excesses." Moreover, these complaints were almost the only way the Cult Commission could obtain information on the religious policy situation in the provinces. The first solution to this problem was, as we have seen, that the Cult Commission in Moscow started to send its official letters of inquiry to local organs. As an example, we may note how the CSCRQ stressed on many occasions the need for a unified policy in relation to religious organizations. During the year 1934, the Cult Commission demanded on several occasions that the Soviet Union as a whole should have comprehensive procedures when dealing with religious policy matters.²⁹ These demands were, in any event, quite futile, as the commission could not enforce them.

Together with the problem of how to get information from the provinces, there was the dilemma of how to supervise the actions of the undisciplined local party bosses and implement better policy. According to Arch Getty, the main reason behind the Great Purges was the desire of central party officials to restrict the damaging activity

28 Fainsod 1958, 378. See also Thurston 1996, 185-194.

29 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 33 (pkvk 1, 26/5 1934); GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 33 (pkvk 7, 16/9 1934).

of the local authorities. Getty's interpretation stresses that the use of terror was simply another method of tightening the grip on the nearly independent provinces.³⁰ This opinion – which has been criticized seems to be one of the most fascinating hypotheses that has arisen with regard to the centre-periphery relations in Soviet religious policy. The arguments of Getty could be justified by referring to archival documents from the central level of the Cult Commission; these papers often testify that worry over the nearly independent local satraps troubled officials in Moscow more than anything. These independent areas with their own deeply rooted social networks of dependency appeared to be too problematic to be handled simply by means of written orders. There was a need for more radical solutions.

This urgent need for drastic measures was highlighted even more when looking at the possibilities to resolve this problem; the normal channels of authority seemed closed and the Cult Commission was in the same position as other central organs of the state. Firstly, the Cult Commission played by the book and, as seen above, sent official letters of instruction to the periphery. Subsequently, when facing problems from local officials, the Cult Commission turned to the Soviet procuracy in order to get some help in implementing its will. Nevertheless, this method proved to be too slow and inefficient. The procuracy of the RSFSR, for its part, could only complain that the local officials were engaged in illegal acts in closing down churches. The real problem, however, was in the slow tempo of implementing these acts. As we see here, the Soviet procuracy indirectly admitted that local officials were able to protect themselves against their legal interventions.³¹ As certain other documents from the Soviet judicial system in the mid-1930s testify, the party officials were tightening their political grip, and instead of neutral legal investigations, the leadership of the party demanded more resolute actions against the "counter-revolutionaries."³²

Krasikov's letter to the procuracy of the USSR, Vyshinsky, is an extremely revealing document in this regard. In it Krasikov remarks

30 Getty 1983, 77.

31 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 47. "В Президиум ВЦИК."

32 See RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 120, d. 171, l. 12-20 "ЦК ВКП/б/ - Тов. Сталину, СНК СССР - Тов. Молотову. О кадрах и о работе судов." See also RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 120, d. 171, l. 31-36. ЦК ВКП/б/ - Тов. Сталину, СНК СССР - Тов. Молотову. Совершенно секретно."

to Vyshinsky that in many places judicial officials were simply engaging in an administrative battle against religion. Krasikov was able to list many excesses commented by judicial officials, that contradicted the "correct" religious political line of the Cult Commission. For example, local officials were closing churches without authorization and unjustly insisting on taking grain from religious organizations. As Krasikov mentions, these "illegal" actions were increasing the number of petitions and complaints being sent to central organs. Therefore Krasikov asks Vyshinsky as federal procurator to take the necessary actions to stop these "abnormal procedures."³³

The fight against the habits of local officials was a labor of Sisyphus. Especially when it seems that local officials also had more concrete reasons for their illegal actions against the religious organizations. The local Soviet organs seemed to have had a chronic lack of money and it led them to squeeze the religious organizations. This was ideologically acceptable, in the atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution; gradually demanding taxes from priests and believers turned out to be a profitable business for local officials. The central organs and even the local CSCRQ commissions were quite helpless when facing the basic interests of the local satraps. All they could do, as a certain circular to the Leningrad area reveals, was to send categorical warnings and orders to stop this kind of behaviour. In any event, as this circular put it, local officials simply "loved" religious celebrations, as they afforded them an opportunity to blackmail money from believers.³⁴

Thus, it was no wonder that the central organs would respond to this dilemma only by increasing the powers of the central Cult Commission. The Soviet regime tried to enlarge its authority and established more channels of information to the Soviet periphery by the order of the VTsIK on 7 May 1934. On this occasion, the commission's authority was extended to the rest of Soviet territory. The Cult Commission in Moscow became as an All-Union

33 "...просим Вас принять по линии Прокурора союзных республик срочные меры к предотвращению указанных ненормальностей." GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 39 "Прокурору СССР А.Я. Вышинскому 1.9.1935."

34 See for example, TsGA SPb f. 7384, op.33, d. 112, l.53 "Всем рикам и горсоветам Ленинградской области и инспекторам по делам религиозных культов при райсоветах города Ленинграда. Циркулярно. 1/1-1934."

government organ under the authority of the All-Union Central Executive Committee (TsIK).³⁵ Its rights and authority were confirmed on 30 May 1934 by defining it as an all-union agency with extensive rights over religious policy matters. Moreover, the TsIK ratified its formal relations with the local authorities on 16 July 1934 and in so doing wished to establish better links for the central CSCRRQ over the whole country.³⁶ The basic question remained, nonetheless, unsolved. The illegal actions of the local party bosses continued their "business as usual" and the Cult Commission in Moscow remained as much a "paper-commission" as before.

3. The "open hand" policy and the CSCRRQ

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The Soviet religious policy had always been a touchy area in Soviet foreign policy. The Soviet Foreign Commissariat had always publicly denied rumours concerning any religious persecutions prevailing in the Soviet Union. Moreover, it had discreetly tried to restrict the most obvious and brutal methods of Soviet atheist campaigns during the 1920s. For example, in "Tikhon's case" the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, G.V. Chicherin (1872–1936), had appealed to Stalin to prevent the execution of the Patriarch. As a justification, Chicherin argued that foreign enemies might use the possible execution of Tikhon as a pretext, in order to stir the Polish peasants against the Soviet state. He also stressed that the Western bourgeoisie states and especially the Anglican church of England might become offended if Tikhon were persecuted.³⁷

This "intervention" for a moderate religious policy was also apparent in Soviet relations with the Catholic Church, which had worsened since the Soviet Union had expelled the representatives of the Vatican famine relief mission in 1924. Nevertheless, in 1925 the Soviet regime proposed negotiations in order to settle issues on finances, the religious education of the Catholic population, the

35 GARF f. 3316, op. 27, d. 386, l. 4.

36 GARF f. 3316, op. 27, d. 386, l. 24-30; GARF f. 5263, op. 2, d. 355, l. 13; GARF f. 3316, op. 27, d. 386, l. 36-38; GARF f. 3316, op. 13, d. 22, l. 122.

37 GARF f. 5446e, op. 55, d. 409. "Тов. Сталину. Секретарю ЦК РКП 10. апреля 1923 г." See also TRRR, 127–128, 133–134, 170, 172.

БЕЗБОЖНИК №12

Пролетарии всех стран, соединитесь!

Декабрь 1935

Год издания XIV

Союзу воинствующих безбожников — 10 лет

Рис. М. Черемных



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"X years Jubilee of The League". The methods and means of antireligious propaganda remained as vulgar as ever. Source: Bezbozhnik 1935, No. 12.

appointment of bishops, the promulgation of papal bulls, and general communication between the Vatican and the Soviet Union.³⁸

For many representatives of the Soviet regime, any political compromise with the Vatican was a bitter pill to swallow. As Krasikov put it in his letter to the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Chicherin, any concordat with the Vatican would be harmful for propaganda and would discredit Soviet power in the eyes of the European and American proletariat. According to these hardliners, there was no need to treat the Vatican any differently from other religious organs.³⁹

As seen in the foregoing, the Soviet Foreign Commissariat was anxious to reduce the foreign reactions instigated by rumours of religious persecutions. However, the secret negotiations between the Soviet Union and the Vatican were formally broken off in 1926 when the Soviet secret police discovered the clandestine activities of d'Herbigny, which intensified the suspicions of Soviet hardliners. The second and much more important reason for termination of these secret negotiations may have been the fact that the internal power struggle was turning the Soviet Union in a leftist direction and that Stalin favoured the "Soviet war option." The Catholic church, with its international connections, was a suitable scapegoat. The axis of nationally-minded Poland and the "aggressive" Catholic church was a formidable threat in the minds of the Soviet leadership.⁴⁰

When coming to the mid-1930s, Soviet foreign policy was revised again. Earlier in the 1920s, the relations with foreign powers were orchestrated partly in accordance with the principles of the coming

38 Dunn 1977, 36; Conquest 1968, 82-83. See the protocols of the Politburo meeting of 2 December 1924. RTsKhIDNI f.17, op.3, d.480 (Pp 40, 2/12-24).

39 GARF1 f.5263, op.1, d.55(1) "В народный комиссариат по иностранным делам (22. марта -24)"; GARF1 f.5263, op. 1, d. 55(2) "В Наркоминдел тов. Чичерину ноября 24.23 г.." Despite these warnings, official meetings between Soviet Foreign Commissar Chicherin and Papal Nuncio Pacelli (later Pope Pius XII) took place in Berlin, the first on 6 October 1925 and again on 14 June 1927. These negotiations dealt mainly with the possibility of the legal recognition of Catholicism. Simultaneously the Vatican sent its emissary Michel d'Herbigny (1880-1957) to the Soviet Union for more detailed negotiations. Together with his official duties, he had a clandestine mission secretly to consecrate new Catholic bishops in Soviet Russia. This "dual diplomacy" did not produce lasting results. D'Herbigny was able to consecrate some bishops but quite soon, in August 1926, he was expelled and the bishops he had ordained were put in prison. RTsKhIDNI f.17, op.112, d.353 (PCAP 74, 6/6-26); Dunn 1977, 36; Stehle 1990, 348.

40 RTsKhIDNI f.17, op.112, d.353 (PCAP 77, 8/10-26); RTsKhIDNI f.17, op.112, d.353 (PCAP 80, 24/12-26); Kolarz 1961, 190-191; Dunn 1977, 36-37.

Communist world revolution. However, this goal was downplayed after Stalin took charge; he was more interested in creating socialism in one country and was less and less dependent on the ideological premises of his own party. However, the rise of Nazis in Germany in 1933 represented a major change in Soviet foreign policy. The earlier foreign propaganda and Comintern policy had stressed that there should be no kind of cooperation with Social Democrats or other major enemies. However, from 1934 onwards, this hostile attitude towards the Social Democrats was abandoned; henceforth Social Democrats and Fascists were never termed as ideological "twins" as had been done earlier. Now, after the collapse of the Weimar Republic, Stalin wanted to proclaim a new line in foreign policy. It was after 1933 that the Soviet regime became ready to cooperate with other countries to stabilize Germany. The efforts to master the new situation started in 1934 when the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations. Furthermore, in 1935 M.M. Litvinov (Vallakh, Meer Genokh Moiseevich, 1876–1951) tried to build up a military network, an alliance against Nazism; i.e., the Soviet Union signed a military pact with Czechoslovakia and also with the French government. Consequently, Soviet propaganda started to emphasize that all democratic countries should join forces in a so-called "United Front/Popular Front" against the "bestiality of Fascism." Nevertheless, this was only done in order to be able to "negotiate with strength" with Hitler's government. According to Robert Conquest, Stalin had always cherished the idea of reconciliation with Nazi-Germany.⁴¹

The real significance of this new revision of policies was, of course, only tactical. The whole operation of altering the Comintern slogans was done, as could be seen from the documents of Comintern, in order to win the Social-Democratic "masses" for Communism. The logic of this new operation was simple; the masses of the Western people were supposed to be converted into this new pro-Soviet coalition. So, as the Comintern propaganda stressed, this new United Front was supposed to prove to the Western people that the Soviet Union was the defender of its interests. As this consistency of Communism, Comintern secretaries, simplified their ideas, the main emphasis of this new turn was to demonstrate to the Western people

41 Kennan 1961, 293–295; Conquest 1993, 218–219. Also as Robin Blick states, Stalin's real object was actually to form a "united front" with Nazi-Germany against the decadent West. Blick 1995, 59.

that "we have everything good, they have everything bad." Moreover, the Western communists should remain suspicious of the ideology of the church, especially when dealing with peasantry.⁴²

In practice, the adoption of the new policy required change in nearly all the slogans utilized in Comintern propaganda. As mentioned earlier, one of these new slogans was concerned with the need to create a unified alliance among all those who sought to resist Nazism. In accordance with this line, the Comintern and the European communist parties were told that their foremost concern must now be the maintenance of civil peace in their bourgeoisie societies and the fight against the common enemy. Earlier ideological confrontations were supposed to be pushed aside when Moscow wanted to emphasize this common cause. This was especially visible during the crisis of Saarland, when, e.g. the German communists were told to reject earlier "sectarian" slogans such as "For a Red Saar!" and alter them to "For Status Quo!." Too radical or too ideological slogans were now forgotten in order to entice liberals and conservatives in the West to join these "leagues of resistance."⁴³

The objectives of Soviet foreign policy vacillated from a determination to chain Hitler's Germany to Stalin's will to negotiate with Nazis in strength. Together with the necessity to improve relations with the West, these aspects dictated this new "open hand" policy. In all these options, it was crucial for the Soviet Union to preserve its prestige in the eyes of the bourgeoisie states. Naturally, the Soviet ideologists were now in awkward situations. As we may detect from the Soviet newspapers of that time, one of the main objectives was to maintain to Western nations and people that there was no need to fear of the Soviet rule; the ghost of bloody revolution and undemocratic principles were now introduced in a better light. Accordingly, the Soviet ideologists were eager to declare to the

42 RTsKhIDNI f. 494, op. 1, d. 8, l. 7 "Протокол заседания комиссии по выработке тезисов к VII конгрессу Коминтерна"; RTsKhIDNI f. 494, op. 1, d. 3, l. 111-112 "Заседание по 1-ому пункту порядка дня 23.8.34"; RTsKhIDNI f. 494, op. 1, d. 7. ll. 18-23. "Обсуждение проектов тезисов Политкомиссии. Выступление Мануильского"; RTsKhIDNI f. 494, op.1, d. 12, ll. 180-181. "Проект главы отчетного доклада Исполкома Коминтерна VII конгрессу: борьба Коминтерна за крестьянство."

43 KIPVK, 115, 202. The idea of "United Front" against Fascism was emphasised in the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. This slogan, however, was abandoned later at the Sixth Congress (1928). Hochman 1984, 80-81.

foreign audience that, among other democratic principles, freedom of religion actually prevailed inside the Soviet Union. Consequently, the reactions of the foreign audience were regarded as more and more important in this relation and inquiring delegations from abroad were treated in the mid-1930s with kid gloves and propaganda.

For the representatives of the Cult Commission in Moscow this meant a new additional assignment, and from the early 1930s the members of the CSCRQ had the important duty of dealing with foreign delegates who were interested in the religious situation in the Soviet Union, and they were usually put in charge of formulating official explanations.⁴⁴ The tactics of the members of the CSCRQ were simple, the Soviet side denied all charges made by the foreign press. For example, the chairman of the Cult Commission, Smidovich, often simply explained to foreign newspapermen that the Soviet Union did not persecute religion as such. After the sudden death of Smidovich, Yaroslavsky inherited this duty of official spokesman and, for example, in his meeting with an American group of intelligentsia, he simply denied that there existed any kind of religious persecution in the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

The highlight of the Soviet propaganda aimed at winning Western souls lay on heated declarations and propaganda delivered to the international audience. As another example, we may take a speech of A.V. Kosarev's (1903–1939), who in front of an international audience explicitly stated that all rumours about the persecution of religion were only fabricated by enemies of the USSR; Communists and nonbelievers "actually respected" feelings of the believers. According to Kosarev, the Communists no longer classified Catholics in the category of enemies, both groups having "mutual interests in the struggle for peace." This speech was, of course, not meant for domestic consumption and if it would have been given before an

44 For negotiations between the members of this commission on how to handle these meetings with foreign delegates, see GARF f. 5263, op.1, d.39, rol.2. By intense falsifying of facts, the Soviet propaganda apparatus was able to convince many foreign scholars that the Soviet society was actually stable. For example, a certain American sociologist, Wasserman, believed in the 1930s that "the majority of youth and a great amount of the workers and peasants of an older generation truly believe in dogmas of revolution". See SP3, 207.

45 RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op.4, d. 56. l. 14. "Беседа тов. Ярославского с американской группой интеллигентов, посетивших СССР летом 1936. Стенограмма."; GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 30 "Г-ну С.М. Чемберлену."

audience in the USSR, the author would have been sure to attract the attention the NKVD. Nevertheless, the objective of the Soviet power was now clear: to entice believers into the Popular Fronts.⁴⁶ Sometimes these explanations to Western audiences were touching and naive to an extreme. As one of these ideologists, a certain Putintsev, was eager to demonstrate in a lengthy article, real freedom of consciousness existed inside the Soviet Union. He also stressed that there had been good reasons to confiscate church bells since local peasants had in some cases needed metal in order to be able to purchase a tractor (sic!).⁴⁷

The actual "Nazi coup" was treated with silent astonishment in Soviet newspapers. As Robert Conquest has remarked, Stalin did not consider Hitler's government as "a major problem" and even from the very beginning tried to establish confidential contacts with it.⁴⁸ Moreover, Stalin probably wanted to await the aftermath of the power struggle in Germany and know whether the Nazi rule would be only a short interlude and whether the opposition would overthrow Hitler.

These hopes were, in any event, vain. Although the Soviet newspapers at first treated the situation in Germany with official restrictions in order to avoid political provocations, they were eagerly commenting on all signs of possible upheavals in the new Germany. Therefore all forms of opposition were noted in their pages and commented on in an apprehensive tone. For example, in 1935, articles appeared in the Soviet newspapers in which the battle between the Nazi regime and the Catholic Church and the German "Confessionalist" church was commented on with caution. The natural question was, could the ecclesiastical opposition be a potential ally for anti-Fascist forces? Could there even be transient cooperation with churches that were opposing Hitler?

The old and expected ideological reaction of the Soviet commentators was to place believers in the same category with enemies.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Soviet side did realize the potential help

46 KI 1936, No. 14, 52–54. "Молодежь на борьбу за сохранение мира! (Речь представителя советской молодежи на женевском юношеском конгрессе борьбы за мир 3.9.1936 г.)"

47 PZM 1937, No. 2, 65–66, 68–69, 70–72, 74–79. "О свободе совести в СССР."

48 Conquest 1993, 217.

49 For "more realistic" opinions ("The German Lutheran Church is a weapon of Hitler's") concerning the churches in the West; see KI 1935, No. 20–21, 87. "Фашизм и единый фронт во Франции." See also PZM 1937 No. 8, 166–168,

of these religious organizations and slowly started to cherish this idea of agreement even with believers when organizing united leagues against the Nazis. But the change of mind did not come easily. For many Soviet ideologists this did not occur in 1935; i.e., the newspaper *Bezbozhnik* told its readers that the fight between Hitler and ecclesiastical oppositionists was simply nominal. Actually, the Soviet audience was told that the "Kirchenkampf" was a *kto kogo* – "who-whom" situation – the question was who would be in charge of the churches in Germany – the Nazi government or oppositionists. As the newspaper *Bezbozhnik* stated, it was the same who would defraud them, Hitler or religion.⁵⁰

Interestingly enough, it seemed that the antireligious Soviet newspapers and ideological bulletins were gradually obliged to swallow the bitter pill and acknowledge these new allies. This was emphasized even more in the speeches of foreign communists. Actually, it was the Comintern, which became a mouthpiece of collaboration among all anti-Fascist people. Later, after the Nazis had stabilized their power in Germany and there was no fear of ecclesiastical counterrevolution, the French Communist party, (a German Communist) Wilhelm Florin (1894–1944) and Maurice Thorez (1900–1964), were advising Western Communists to learn some respect from former enemies when facing the threat of Nazism. In actual fact, the French comrades were asked to rectify their earlier political programmes and told that it was not appropriate to identify ecclesiastical organizations with the Fascist ones in France. The local Western Communists were told to march "hand in hand" with Christian workers and peasants.⁵¹

This change in policy was, of course, rather difficult to explain to

174–177. "О некоторых фактах контрреволюционной и шпионской деятельности духовенства." See also PZM 1937 No. 10, 143 "Контрреволюционная роль религиозных организаций и антирелигиозная пропаганда."

50 *Bezbozhnik* 1935, No. 8 "Пролетарский атеизм в борьбе против войны и фашизма."

51 KI 1935, No. 25, 9. "Народный фронт во Франции (М. Торез. Речь на VII конгрессе Коминтерна. 3.8.1935)"; KI 1935, No. 26, 53–54. "Р. Гюйо. Комсомол Франции в борьбе за народный фронт." See also KI 1935, No. 25, 58–61. "В. Флорин. За единый пролетарский и народный антифашистский фронт в Германии" (сокращенная стенограмма речи на VII конгрессе Коминтерна 3.8.1935). See also KI 1936, No. 15, 53–54. "Народный фронт во Франции и задачи КПФ."

the Soviet populace and the Soviet ideologists had to work hard when justifying this volte-face. One solution was to explain this religious opposition as a "primitive mass protest" against the the Fascist regime. According to this explanation, the German bourgeoisie who at that time was against Hitler, did not oppose Fascism in principle but because it did not want to support the idea of a nation as an absolute principle.⁵² However, it is strange to note how after the years of the Cultural Revolution and ideological purity, the gate for collaboration with Communists was now open to nearly everyone. As Florin declared, the Popular Front was open to all Social Democrats, Christians, non-party people and even to those who were under the influence of National Socialism – in short, to all those who were willing to join a united front against Fascism.⁵³ These new prospects of cooperation with ecclesiastical organizations raised fantastic and unrealistic hopes among some foreign Communist delegates. Nevertheless, it is fascinating to see how this new "*deus ex machina*" – cooperation with religious organizations was supposed to be the key element in the fight against Nazism. For example, the "powerful" mass organizations of the Catholic Church with their "centuries-old traditions" raised strong hopes in a certain Spanish delegate in the Comintern.⁵⁴

The logic of this tactical alliance with the Western masses of believers was simple. The Soviet Union would not alter its own policy in relation to its own believers but was more than willing to cooperate with all kinds of people abroad, provided they were anti-Nazi. In fact, "the policy of the open hand" was not intended for internal use in the Soviet Union. However, in its leading newspapers and journals, the Soviet government contemplated and discussed the new situation and possibility of an alliance with "alien elements." The help of religious organizations was therefore considered very useful in foreign activities towards forming a "democratic front" against Fascists. The importance of this union was that it provided a possibility for "cooperation" even with the religious organizations. This, of course, did not mean that

52 KI 1935, No. 30, 28. "Новый путь в совместной борьбе за свержение фашистской диктатуры."

53 KI 1935, No. 30, 41 "Наше отношение к социал-демократии." See also KI 1935, No. 31-32, 67 "Спасем нашу страну от катастрофы! (Воззвание ЦК компартии Италии)."

54 See KI 1935, No. 35-36, 36. "Борьба за единый пролетарский фронт и народный антифашистский фронт в Испании."

religious organizations were encouraged inside the Soviet Union – actually quite the opposite was the case. However, this was another reason to preserve a decent façade in Soviet religious policy.

This cooperation with ideological arch-enemies was never wholeheartedly approved of inside the Soviet ideological apparatus. Even one of the most authoritative Communist periodicals, *Bolshevik*, commented on the possibilities of cooperation with churches in a dry, nearly academic tone. Interestingly enough, ecclesiastical representatives at different peace congresses and their speeches were scrutinized with keen interest in this mouthpiece of Soviet ideology. The usefulness of such people was something that the Soviet ideologists always, willy nilly, recognized. However, in order to maintain the general party line, e.g., to take over the non-Communist organizations in the West, as it was agreed upon at the VII Comintern congress, these Christian organizations were not supposed to be neglected. As a matter of fact, the Catholic people constituted a substantial part of the population of Germany and Soviet officials working in the Comintern realized that they were to be treated with care and should not be allowed to be enticed by Hitler.⁵⁵ The situation was different in the SVB movement; obviously the antireligious activists in the Soviet Union were not so eager to treasure these new comrades-in-arms. Their position was, however, concealed under mild criticism when facing political necessity dictated from higher instances. For example, the newspaper *Bezbozhnik* could publish a lengthy account of I.G. Ehrenburg's (1891–1967), who had cast doubt on the honesty of priests working in the Popular Front. As Ehrenburg claimed, "today they (priests) write in a Fascist newspaper, another day they are responsible for an anti-Fascist meeting."⁵⁶

During 1936, the high hopes concerning the possibility of utilizing ecclesiastical organizations in the West to destabilize the Nazi regime began to fade. The Nazi government was finally able to get "a concordat" – a treaty – with the Roman Catholic Church and by forming the National Church of Germany, thus overcoming formidable

55 KI 1937, No. 6, 84–86. "Третий фронт - опасный самообман католических кругов Германии." See also *Bolshevik* 1936, No. 19, 72, 74–78. "Международный конгресс мира"; *Bolshevik* 1937, No. 1, 83. "Германский народ обвиняет."

56 "...сегодня они пишут в фашистской газете, завтра себе же отвечают на антифашистском митинге." *Bezbozhnik* 1935, No.12, 9. "Французские попы и единый народный фронт."

protestant churches. This new concord in Germany was a shock to many and not least to the Soviet regime. The natural bitterness arising from these fading hopes was also visible in official Soviet propaganda. Finally, the "ecclesiastics" had acted in accordance with their real nature – these organizations rejected the idea of cooperation against the Nazis! Ironically enough, it seems here that the Soviet commentators were among the most ardent defenders of "real Christians" in Germany. According to these Soviet commentators, the betrayal was at the leadership level of the churches – the Vatican and protestant leaders had abandoned their flocks and allowed Fascism to persecute the "Catholic masses" or "protestant population."⁵⁷

Despite these lost hopes, the idea of a Popular Front with noncommunists, i.e., believers was never really abandoned. When the hope of utilizing believers in fighting the Nazis in Germany was fading, the appeals were directed at other countries, especially the Western intelligentsia. For Soviet ideologists, this appeared more than appropriate. Instead of these "wavering" religious organizations, the newspaper *Bezbozhnik* introduced new allies – the Western freethinkers. The congress of free-thinkers held in 1936 in Prague was celebrated on the pages of this newspaper to quite a degree. The congress itself was convened as a congress of unity between the Western, "bourgeoise-liberal", anticlerical movement and the Soviet "proletarian" atheists. The newspaper *Bezbozhnik* was especially ready to utilize a letter issued by Romain Rolland (1866–1944), the famous French novelist, which called on his movement to prepare to fight Fascism, was highly eulogized as a leading document at this congress. According to the deputy of the SVB movement, A. Lukachevsky, the congress had concentrated on fighting against the "barbarism of Fascism, imperialist war and *popovshchina*." The message of his article seemed obvious; between the lines, the author seemed to declare that it was more appropriate for the USSR to cooperate on a

57 See KI 1937, No. 4, 105–109. "Гитлеровский фашизм против католических масс"; KI 1937, No. 4, 110–112. "Наступление Гитлера и Розенберга на протестантское население." The reaction of the newspaper *Bezbozhnik* was notoriously malicious: "...как и следовало ожидать, церковники всех стран (прежде всего – католические) находятся в первых рядах врагов пролетарского единого фронта." *Bezbozhnik* 1935, No. 3, 16 "Католицизм – оплот мировой реакции." See also more official "bitter" reactions, KI 1937, No. 4, 93–95. "Послание папы римского о положении католической церкви в Германии."

united front with less suspect people than believers. Instead of bargains with religious organizations, Lukachevsky recommended that freethinkers, scholars, writers, artists could be called on to fight for the "freedom of thought, for the right of individuality against the gloomy powers of religion and churches, against the obscurantism and barbarism of Fascism."⁵⁸ Especially Yaroslavsky, the leader of the Soviet antireligious movement, was eager to advertise the need for cooperation with Western freethinkers instead of Catholics.⁵⁹

However, despite the failures in enticing official churches to join in the fight against Hitler, the call for a united front persisted as an official part of Soviet foreign policy before World War II. According to their official dogma, the Soviet delegates and ideologists were obliged to seek support for the unified movement against the Nazis. The opportunity to denounce the "persecutions" of the Catholic believers, monks and priests in Germany was too good an issue to be missed in Comintern newspapers and propaganda. The paradox of this situation was that the Soviet newspapers, which were willing to root out all religious dissenters in their own country, were in their propaganda supporting religious dissidents in Germany. Or as Comintern officials declared, there was a real opportunity to work together with radicals, liberals, Catholics, Christians, pacifists. Despite ideological differences, the need to work jointly against the threat coming from Germany was the main maxim.⁶⁰ As mentioned, the international union of freethinkers was regarded as a potential ally in the fight against Fascism. The Soviet side was eager to demonstrate that League, SVB was not trying to meddle in the affairs of the international union of freethinkers but was only ready to "assist" these foreign comrades with their experience. However, the official explanation was that it was the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, not ordinary Catholic people, that had been working against democratic forces.⁶¹

58 Bezbozhnik 1936, No. 6, 3. "Конгресс единства." See also Seppo 1992, 26–27, 37.

59 See RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op. 4, d. 59, ll. 31, 35–36. "Борьба против религии на современном этапе."

60 KI 1936, No. 7, 51–52. "Международная юношеская конференция мира."; KI 1937, No. 6, 31. "Гитлеровский фашизм - поджигатель войны." See also Bolshevik 1938, No. 3, 79. "Международный обзор."

61 KI 1936, No. 9, 42–43, 45, 49. "Борьба за проведение линии VI конгресса КИМ"; KI 1936, No. 10, 29 "Борьба с гитлеровцами и Габсбургами в

This Soviet explanation of the reactionary ecclesiastical hierarchy and radical masses of believers gives us a key to why the actual cooperation never took place between these two parties. The churches, for their part, were too preoccupied with the rumours of "bestial antireligious campaigns" in the USSR. The Soviet ideologists and the antireligious activists, on the other hand, (even some officials inside the Comintern) were too stuck up in their doctrinal disagreements with religion. They could only put the blame on the higher hierarchy; it was the Vatican that was engaged in anticommunism, not the masses of Catholic believers.⁶²

Consequently, it was ideological distrust that made the difference. As Isaac Deutscher put it...

"..No matter how moderate and "purely" democratic, how constitutional and "purely" patriotic, were the slogans he [Stalin] had composed the Popular Fronts, he could not undo the revolutionary potentialities of these Fronts."⁶³

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Австрии"; КИ 1936, No. 11-12, 51. "Развертывание демократической революции в Испании"; КИ 1936, No. 11-12, 133. "Заседание президиума Исполкома Коминтерна в мае"; КИ 1936, No. 11-12, 77. "Единый фронт в Швейцарии"; КИ 1936, No. 13, 57. "Действительные правители Австрии."

62 КИ 1936, No. 16, 70-74. "Католики на распутье."

63 Deutscher 1967, 422.

IV The quest for unification and the years of the Great Terror (1936–1938)

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1. General background

The "good years" of the 1930s came to an end as Stalin's reign of terror and purges were launched in 1937–1938. Open questions, such as the number of victims, the scale of the damage, and the names of the guilty still remain open.¹ However, if leaving the horrible figures and the moral condemnation aside, we must try to find rational explanations for this bacchanalia of blood that took place in the Soviet Union during the late 1930s.

The peculiarity of the reign of terror and the purges was that they coincided with the pseudo-liberal reforms and reorganizations of the Soviet institutions. Consequently, the Soviet life during the late 1930s was characterized by an absurd dichotomy of both hilarious and dreary realities. For instance, as the secret police was hunting down convicted people's families in order to fulfil its quota of "enemies of people", the ordinary Soviet people were celebrating their new "democratic" way of life. The cries of pain echoing from the execution chambers did not disturb people's merrymaking in popular dance halls. On the contrary, while prisons were being crowded with people's enemies, the Soviet press was discussing such matters as equality and

¹ For the latest figures (made by the Russians themselves) concerning the numbers of victims, see LM, 37–50; Demidov-Kutuzov 1990, 41; Shelestov 1990, 8; Antonov-Ovscenko 1996, 3–5. See also Western evaluations: Wheatcroft 1996, 1319–1353 *versus* Getty & Rittersporn & Zemskov 1993, 1017–1044.

democracy. Furthermore, the Soviet cinema was showing high-spirited, joyous films alongside show-trials² – recalling of ongoing witch hunts. The same peculiar dichotomy was apparent when we examine Soviet religious policy and the "fall" of the Cult Commission in 1936–1938.

2. The 1936 Constitution, elections, census of 1937 and question of clerical "misinterpretations"

The main reform of the late 1930s was the Constitution of 1936. This new law was promoted personally by Stalin during the plenum of the Central Committee in February 1935. The principles of this new legislation were simple, such as "further democratization" and bringing the Soviet constitution into conformity "with the present correlation of class forces in the USSR." The official slogans for these democratic gestures were "consolidation" and "victory" of the Soviet rule. As Molotov stressed in his speech to the VII Congress of Soviets, the Soviet Union had "rebuilt its socio-economic basis, transforming the country into a socialist one."³ The message of the Soviet regime was clear, confirming the fact that the Stalinist socialism had been victorious. As Molotov emphasized, no internal threat existed. In accordance with the Stalinist interpretation of history, socialism had been victorious inside the USSR and the working class had organized itself around the party. Even the prodigal son of the Soviet society - the peasantry - was working unified in socialist agriculture. Moreover, the intelligentsia was for socialism. In accordance with the new optimism, the internal enemies had been rooted out and it was time to relax. Since, the former exploiters were extinct, it was possible to loosen the discipline of the proletarian dictatorship. Consequently, the band of people's enemies was supposed to decline in numbers; as a

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2 The names of these films are quite revealing: "*Happy-Go-Lucky Guys*" (one of the Stalin's favourites), "*Circus*", "*Volga, Volga*", see Geldern & Sities 1995, 234–235.

3 "...Наша страна коренным образом перестроилась в своей социально-экономической основе, преобразовавшись в страну социалистическую." Molotov 1935, 11.

matter of fact, according to Molotov, only 2.5% (!) of the adult population were disfranchised, having lost the full status of Soviet citizenship, and had no right to participate in elections.⁴

As pointed out in the foregoing, the Constitution of 1936 was supposed to be the manifestation of "triumphant socialism" in Russia. The actual mission to draw up the new Soviet Constitution was given to a special commission, consisting of future people's enemies, such as Bukharin and Radek. The commission was supposed to make a draft of this law. Stalin, a great manipulator of audiences, was also capable of quasi-democratic manoeuvres when necessary. In accordance with his wishes, Soviet officials announced that a nationwide discussion on the Constitution would be organized in order to give the ordinary people an opportunity to suggest possible revisions. As a result, Stalin's Constitution was contemplated at approximately 527,000 meetings, attended by 36,5 million Soviet citizens. More than 154,000 amendments were suggested. Interestingly enough, only 43 changes were made as a result of these proposals coming from ordinary Soviet citizens.⁵

Together with the official constitutional commission, a legion of Soviet ideologists enlisted to contemplate the coming Soviet Constitution. It seemed that the real ambition of these ideologists was to preserve the Soviet system and Bolshevik idea of class-state conception. Especially, the often used word "democratism" could raise

4 Molotov 1935, 11, 17. Compare this information with earlier statistical figures, see SSS, 57, 900-901; Zhiromskaya 1996, 104, 120, 122, 125, 153. As seen here, during 1928-1929 there occurs a dramatic and "too good" decline of these "lishentsy." See also Bolshevik 1935, No. 1, 1-4. "Седьмой Всесоюзный Съезд Советов. Передовая"; Bolshevik 1935, No. 3, 1-8. "Победы социализма и расцвет советской демократии. Передовая." See especially the detailed article of Ya. Berman in which he "comments" on the dramatic decline of the "lishentsy." SG 1936, No. 5, 11, 43-44. "Советское избирательное право." See also ISK 1957, 28-29.

5 See protocols and documents from the actual draft-commission. GARF f. 6982, op. 1. See also, *Izvestiya* 12 June 1936, No. 136(5993); Larina-Bukharina 1990, 404. "Всенародное обсуждение началось." The future "people's enemy", Bukharin used to contemplate on the Soviet Constitution in the newspaper *Izvestiya* before his arrest, see *Izvestiya*, 1936, June 14, No. 137 (5994) "Конституция Социалистического Государства"; *Izvestiya*, 1936, June 15, No. 138(5995) "Конституция Социалистического Государства, продолжение см. Известия No. 137." With reference to popular discussion concerning the Constitution, see RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op.120, d. 232, l. 36-52. "Докладная записка о ходе всенародного обсуждения проекта Конституции СССР на 15/X -1936 г. ." See also Little 1989, 81.

the eyebrows of some Communists. These ideologists therefore concentrated their main efforts on explaining why the Soviet Union could not constitute a Western-type democracy. According to these explanations, the idea that the Soviet Union was copying Western models of democracy was, of course, out of the question. The general outcry of these texts was that the Soviet democracy was something higher and more democratic than the system prevailing in the West. When making their apology, they justified the idea of the social inequality of the Soviet system, claiming it to be a logical outcome of Marxism. Moreover, as these articles pointed out and as Molotov reiterated, Communists had "suppressed" only a tiny minority of the populace, just 2.5% of the whole population.⁶

Therefore, it was not surprising that this army of party ideologists proved to be right when they expected that the new Constitution would consolidate the one-party system. The class-minded principles of the proletarian dictatorship remained a part of the new Soviet Constitution. According to certain Western observers such as Aryeh Unger, the Constitution of 1936 seemed to be even more "conservative" than its predecessors (the 1918 and 1924 Constitutions). The real significance of this Constitution was, however, that it consolidated the achievements of the Stalinist society and calmed down the people while the society was under the yoke of the Great Terror. The democratic features of this new law also made an impact on foreign and domestic propaganda. Stalin himself was one of the most eager Soviet leaders to stress the new democratic nature of this Constitution to foreign inquirers. For example, in his interview with the American journalist Roy Howard, Stalin predicted that "vivid election campaigns" would be held in the future.⁷ Finally, it should be

6 Bolshevik 1935, No. 5, 35-47. "Социализм и равенство"; Bolshevik 1935, No. 6, 31-35. "Пролетарское государство и изменения в Конституции СССР"; Bolshevik 1936, No. 11, 75-83. "Всеобщее, прямое, равное избирательное право при тайном голосовании." Bolshevik 1936, No. 14, 76-89. "Отклики международной печати на проект новой Конституции СССР." See also how a certain B. Borilin suggested to do away with former exploiters. "...А исчезнуть в жизни оно может лишь по мере полного уничтожения капиталистических элементов и их остатков." It is hard to judge whether this means physical killings or just economical means to undermine these lishentsy. See Bolshevik 1935, No. 17, 47. "Советская демократия."

7 Bolshevik 1936, No. 6, 7-8. "Беседа товарища Сталина с председателем американского газетного объединения 'Скрипис-Говард Нюслейперс' -ном Рой Говардом 1-го марта 1936 года."

remembered that the Constitution of 1936 was a kind of a message of solidarity to the ordinary people. The quasi-democratic features of this "Stalinist Constitution" were highlighting the fact that "Khozyain" - the "Boss" - was actually neglecting his own party and appealing to ordinary - "little people" (маленькие люди) - and seeking their support.⁸

The earlier Soviet Constitutions were based on the Marxist ideas of social discrimination of former exploiting classes. This same idea was expressed clearly in the drafts of the new Constitution and it was justified by the class nature of the Soviet state. The draft commission mentioned earlier had proposed that this new Constitution would preserve old principles. In fact, in one of its suggestions it proposed that political rights should be granted to all with one exception: those who had limited rights, i.e. *lishentsy*.⁹ As Arch Getty has emphasized, the majority of the public proposals concerning the Constitution of 1936 were *against* the idea that the "former people" should be rehabilitated politically. According to Getty, this was a result of the Soviet people's "sceptical plebeian reaction and general nonacceptance of many of the concepts of Western liberalism embodied in the text."¹⁰ However, Stalin personally rejected these class-minded suggestions and adopted more "liberal" principles; according to Stalin's amendments, political rights should be given to all Soviet citizens, i.e., to former Imperial officers and priests. Nonetheless, this "revolutionary" democratic gesture of Stalin's was made only as a counterweight to the Great Terror; during the purges and executions, Stalin himself was eagerly demonstrating in public that the Soviet Union was about to take a step towards real democracy. The inconsistency of this was, of course, immense. In a way, Stalin had a sense of vicious melodrama; "the enemies of the people" were scheming up a draft for a new Constitution and Soviet ideologists were celebrating Stalin's word that "sons are not responsible for the deeds of their fathers."¹¹

8 Unger 1981, 79-83; Clark 1984, 195-206; Khlevnyuk 1996, 152. As Sheila Fitzpatrick has remarked during the Great Purge, Soviet officials tried to calm down the feelings of the peasantry by organizing trials against the local officials. The charges were usually connected to the "arbitrary activity" or "abuse of power" of these local satraps. Fitzpatrick 1993, 299-311.

9 GARF f. 6982, op.1, d. 1. "Проект Конституции (основной закон)."

10 See Getty 1993, 126.

11 *Bolshevik* 1936, No. 9, 17. "Социализм и народ"; *Bolshevik* 1936, No. 11, 1-7.

The liberal intervention of Stalin in civil rights also changed the principles of the Soviet religious policy. According to the new Constitution, the former disfranchised bourgeoisie and servants of cults were now granted political rights! It was therefore understandable that this liberal gesture of Stalin's forced the party ideologists and other communists to perform new ideological zig-zags. Accordingly, the Cult Commission compiled one of the most significant secret summaries on the impact of the new Constitution. This special "*Report on the state of religious organizations in the USSR, their relation to the proposed new Constitution, the work of the Commission of Cults of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, and the practices of implementing legislation on religious cults*" was handed to the Presidium of the TsIK. It is one of the most revealing documents of that time. The candid evaluations and outlines of this report also expose the basic dilemmas of the Cult Commission with reference to relations to local officials. Consequently, this document is also one of the most authoritative pieces of evidence stating that the officials in the central organs in Moscow were aware of difficulties involved in supervising the brutal and independent activity of local officials in religious-political matters. And as had happened on many previous occasions, the central Cult Commission suggested more drastic measures to be taken as far as the local Soviet officials were concerned.¹²

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If we examine this document in more detail, we may see how it demonstrates the drastic decline of the churches and prayer houses in the Soviet Union. The number of churches had decreased (see Table IV.1) in the RSFSR from 39, 530 (pre-revolutionary figure, 1914) to 19, 212.¹³ If areas such as the Ukraine SSR, the Caucasian Federative SSR, the Belorussian SSR and the Uzbekistan SSR are taken into

"Конституция социалистического государства рабочих и крестьян. Передовая." See also KP, 1938, No. 17. "Дело комсомолки Простомоловой."

12 See GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 32. rol. 1, ll. 1-26. See also reaction of an ordinary party worker on allowing political rights to priests. "...и попы как живущие на нетрудовые доходы должны быть лишены избирательных прав и права быть избранными...." RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 120, d. 232, l. 71. "Письма, показывающие, как работники на местах неправильно объясняют отдельные статьи конституции, извращают их, вводят в заблуждение колхозников."

13 Did not include figures from Eastern Siberiya, except the Kazakhskaya and Buryat-Mongolian autonomous republics, the Chelyabinskaya, Omsk and Orenburg oblasts.

Table IV.1. Status of Religious Buildings in the USSR, April 1, 1936. GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 32, l. 3.

Buildings open before 1917 Revolution

RSFSR	39 530
Ukraine	12 380
Caucasus	3 965
Belorussia	2 183
Uzbekistan	15 905
USSR	73 963

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	closed legally	not closed
RSFSR	20 318	19 212
Ukraine	7 341	4 487
Caucasus	3 310	655
Belorussia	1 706	477
Uzbekistan	9 193	5 712
USSR	41 868	30 543

account, the number of prayer houses dropped from 72, 936 (in 1914) to 30, 543. As the document emphasized, compared with the original number, only 23.5% of the churches and prayer houses were functioning in the Soviet Union. In some places, Communist officials had been very effective, i.e., in Yakutia there was only one functioning church for believers out of the original 72 (1.6%).¹⁴ There were also local areas where all the churches had been obliterated; e.g., there were no functioning churches in 34 raions of the Saratov district's 53

14 There were also other neglected areas, such as (DVK) the Far-East krai (1.6%), the Circassian autonomous oblast (1.6%), Azerbaijani (4.3%), the Volga German republic (5.8%) and Armenia (6.4%) functioning religious premises indicated in parentheses.

raions. Moreover, as the document reveals, in many places there was no functioning church in adjacent areas (within 20-30-50 kilometres) where believers could "satisfy their religious needs." Nevertheless, as the document notes, there were also areas where over half of the churches had been preserved for religious use. Places such as Ivanovsk's oblast had 903 (61.3%) churches functioning compared with 1473 churches in use before the October Revolution.¹⁵

Significantly this document also stressed that the publication of the Constitution of 1936 had encouraged nearly all the religious organizations to make complaints and petitions to the higher instances. According to this document, (compare to Table IV.2.) the number of written petitions to Kalinin and petitions made *in corpore* (ходоков) to the Cult Commission had increased dramatically. Moreover, it claimed that the nature of these petitions had become more aggressive by the publication of the Constitution; henceforth people started to make demands rather than appeals. In many cases, believers could appeal to higher instances only by stating that the new Constitution was on their side. Furthermore, the believers had been able to exploit the neglects and errors of local officials. For instance if locals had not been able to turn the closed churches into any civil use, the believers could then demand that these churches be opened. In some cases, the new Constitution had encouraged them to ask for permission to perform their religious rites out in the open sky or even inspired them to draw up lengthy lists of demands with "overtly hostile expressions" such as reducing the taxes for religious premises to a minimum and "religious" amnesty, etc.¹⁶

The confused tone of this report reveals how the leading officials were quite aware of the problematic attitude of the local authorities. Actually, the Cult Commission in Moscow regarded the brutal activity against the mass of believers as one of the main reasons for problems in the Soviet religious policy. Moreover, people's listed demands and believer's numerous petitions were not left disregarded. Moreover, this report clearly shows how the Cult Commission had to fight on two

15 See RPTsKG, 300-302; RSS, 291-296.

16 For peoples reactions to the Soviet Constitution, see GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 32, rol.2 ; See also GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 34, rol. 2; GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 50, l. 14-15. "Председателю Центрального Исполнительного Комитета С.С.С.Р тов. Калинин 30 июля 1936 года." See also VG, 20 May, 1937, No. 47 "В СССР."

Table IV.2. Conclusion on the work of the CSCRQ during 1935
GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 21, rol.2.

2010	petitions.....concerning the taxes of servants of cults
1832	petitions.....concerning the liquidation of churches or other religious premises
11718	petitions.....concerning temporary closing of religious premises

petitions on the (hodokov) on personal basis

142	1932.....3219
	1933.....1719
	1934.....1094
	1935.....2090

fronts; firstly against overzealous local atheists and secondly against stubborn believers. The logical aftermath of this fight was that both believers and local atheists did not fully understand the role and position of these institutions. For believers the Cult Commission was just another persecutor; a part of the Soviet system. For local Communists the Cult Commission appeared as too "soft" and ineffective central organ.

Nevertheless, with regard to the reasons for the mild *détente* in the Soviet religious policy in the mid-1930s, it was not only the resistance of the population or the will to appease foreign countries that brought a breathing space to the ROC. The explanation of the gradual *modus vivendi* with the ruling Communist regime was a new nationalistic attitude adopted by the Soviet government towards the tradition and Russian history.¹⁷ This, of course, did not mean any concord or peace with the religious organizations. The march of new traditional values represented a kind of restricted rehabilitation of the ROC along with

17 Pipes 1961, 54–55; Carrère-d'Encausse 1982, 30. For the fusion of the Orthodox and Soviet nationalist ideology, see Pål Kolstø's article. Kolstø 1984, 12–24.

its traditional symbols. Of course, it might also be argued that during the Great Terror the religious organizations suffered more than any other institutions in Soviet society. However, the fact is that the end of the 1930s witnessed the mild rehabilitation of the national features of the ROC.

As a revealing example of this new atmosphere we might take the incident when the famous Soviet poet Demyan Bedny composed a comedy featuring old Russian heroes, *Bogatyri*, in a satiric light. In this play Bedny depicted Orthodox clergy and Russian priests as drunken villains with very little intelligence. Suddenly, this play was withdrawn from the theater. The reason for this was Stalin's personal reaction. Stalin did not like Bedny's interpretation of these traditional Russian heroes and the fury of the Gensec was visible in a Politburo decision of 27 December 1936. Stalin's verdict was severe: this most authoritative organ of the Soviet state and communist party condemned Demyan Bedny's *Bogatyri*, considering it, among other things, as "contradicting history", "antihistorical", "alien to Soviet high art." Moreover, the Politburo banned the performance of this work and suggested that P.M. Kerzhentsev (1881–1940), the chairman of the the Committee on Art Affairs of the Council of Peoples Commissars, should write an article in *Pravda* "in the spirit of this decision."¹⁸

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Kerzhentsev's well-known article against Bedny and his play is a good illustration of Stalin's dislike of blasphemy against traditional Russian values. In this article, Kerzhentsev accused Bedny of depicting the baptizing of *Русь* as a "drunken affair." Furthermore, Kerzhentsev, commented that adoption of Christianity had been a positive event in Russian history. Its arrival had provided a link between Russia and West. Also Greek clergy and scholars had arrived in Russia.¹⁹

18 RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 3, d. 982 (Pp 44, 27/12–36).

19 "...В новой редакции была добавлена совсем раньше отсутствовавшая тема разбойников, введено ни с того ни с сего пошло-издевательски изображенное крещение Руси будто бы "по пьяному делу". густо размалевана характеристика русских богатырей." *Izvestiya*, 15 November 1936 No.264(6121). "Фальсификация народного прошлого. (О Богатырях Демьяна Бедного)." The fashion of the 1920s to idolize pagan pre-Christian Russia was now over. See, for example, the instruction manual (from the 1930s) for the Soviet schools strongly advised taking into consideration that it would be "anti-historical and non-marxist" to idealize pre-Christian Russia and ignore the "progressive role of the monasteries" during the first century after the baptism of the *Rus*. PPP, 83-84. See also Vdovin 1995, 220.

Thus, the creation and adoption of the new Constitution proved a watershed in relation to the ROC. Stalin wanted to consolidate his position, not only by terror, but by new reforms. In one sense he dissociated himself from his own party and played a role of "liberal" and wise ruler, who actually was annoyed by the faults and brute actions of his own regime. In his famous speech in the VIII All Russian Congress at the Soviets on 25 November 1936, he confidently endorsed the removal of the political restrictions imposed on "former people", such as priests and former imperial officers. According to Stalin, it was time to abolish these old restrictions and treat the *lishentsy* like other people. As he put it, the Soviet regime was now strong enough and many of these people were no longer enemies of the Soviet rule. The communist audience greeted Stalin's "boldness" with "massive applause."²⁰

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As pointed out, Stalin's "liberal" opinion confronted officials and ideologists inside the Soviet antireligious movement with many problems. It was quite a while before minor leaders could "comment" on the words of the *Vozhd*. The Soviet ideologists and officials, however, realized that Stalin's turning to the people had been only an demagogic gesture – without substance. However, some of the apparatchiks were of course afraid that the enemies of the people – religious organizations – might "misinterpret" or "misuse" the liberties offered to them by Stalin. This fear was obvious in articles and other written texts of that time. The popular Soviet legend of lurking and cunning enemies, capable of exploiting all the mistakes of Soviet power, was discussed again and again in Soviet newspapers. After

20 "...говорят, что это опасно, так как могут пролезть в верховные органы страны враждебные Советской власти элементы, кое-кто из бывших бело-гвардейцев, кулаков, попов и т.д. Ну чего тут собственно бояться? Волков бояться, в лес не ходить. (Веселое оживление в зале, бурные аплодисменты). OKS, 25. "О конституции Союза ССР. Доклад тов. Сталина И.В. на VIII Всесоюзном съезде советов. О проекте Конституции Союза ССР 25 ноября 1936 г.," See also PZM 1936, No. 11, 19–20. "О проекте Конституции Союза ССР." According to a certain Soviet ideologist, I. Akulov, the majority of the proposals coming from the Soviet people dealt with civil rights (article 135). These people demanded that the priests and former enemies should not be allowed any political rights. These demands were usually justified by typical Soviet jargon..."the necessity of limiting the election rights of priests, former kulaks and all those who did not have socially acceptable work" ("...на необходимости лишать избирательных прав попов, бывших кулаков и всех не занимающихся общественнополезным трудом"). *Bolshevik* No. 22, 17. "Всенародное обсуждение проекта сталинской конституции."

adoption of the new Constitution, these fears were aired over and over again in the Soviet newspapers. For example, Yaroslavsky even published a pamphlet which pacified his Communist readers by saying that there had been no real change in Soviet religious policy. The Soviet officials would continue to proceed with antireligious propaganda and fight against religion. As Yaroslavsky put it, if priests considered themselves to be candidates of local Soviets or even the Supreme Soviet, the Communists would reserve the right to fight against these people.²¹

Nonetheless, is the paranoia of the Bolshevik party the only appropriate answer? Could this interpretation explain the sudden abundance of pamphlets and warnings coming from the Soviet ideologists after the adoption of the new Constitution? In the light of archival documents it seems that the very process of the public debate and promulgating the Constitution had encouraged people to make real demands, as the Communists stressed – "impossible demands." The communist oligarchy seemed to realize that democracy was far too dangerous a matter – even to play with. For example, Yaroslavsky himself saw this revitalization of the clergy and believers as a real phenomenon. Consequently, he remarked that ecclesiastical organizations had started "energetic campaigns of demanding

21 Yaroslavsky 1936, 9–14. "...Наше отношение к религии, церкви, к служителям культа остается прежним. Мы попрежнему будем вести антирелигиозную пропаганду." Yaroslavsky 1936, 10. See also how Yaroslavsky defends Stalin's Constitution. RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op. 4, d. 55. "Новая конституция и вопрос о религии (следует ли ограничивать служителей культа в гражданских правах)." As late as 1937 Oleshchuk argued that Stalin's Constitution did not mean that it was time to return to the old society with its privileges for religion. PZM 1937, No. 8, 145–164. "Выборы в советы и антирелигиозная пропаганда"; Bolshevik 1937, No. 20, 39–40. "Против благодущия и беспечности в антирелигиозной работе." See also Krylenko 1936, 38–41. Actually, the 1936 Constitution gave birth to a whole genre of commentaries dealing with this matter. These booklets – "concerning the freedom of religion" – had one common feature: they all wanted to rectify "the wrong" interpretations of this basic law of the Soviet Union. For some examples of these commentaries on the 1936 Constitution, see Kogan & Megrughan 1938, 47–49, 50–51; Kashirin 1939, 33–35, 42–46; Putintsev 1937, 6–7. The danger that believers would enter Soviet politics was, of course, marginal. However, the Soviet leaders seemed to be genuinely afraid that some alien elements might penetrate the Soviet system. Therefore, Stalin's democratic concessions were played down with these numerous pamphlets. See also Kalinin 1937, 3–4, 12; Kotlyar 1937, 7–8, 67–69; Vyshinsky 1937, 12–13. Bakakin 1938, 23–24. See also POVVS 1937, 3; Fitzpatrick 1994, 213.

reopening of the former churches."²²

It seems that the masses of the kolkhoz peasantry were obviously agitated as a result of the new Constitution. Moreover, it appears that believers started to question the acts of local officials and that among the peasantry there were rumours that the new Constitution had finally sanctioned the forced collectivization of 1929–1931. The Cult Commission in Moscow had also realized that the amount of petitions had been increased just after the adoption of the new Constitution.²³ Another interesting feature was the wave of émigré commentators who were busy criticizing this new new Constitution as Potemkin's façade.²⁴

The real tests for the new Constitution were the elections of the Supreme Soviet organized in 1937.²⁵ The government, seeking desperately the total submission of the population, was, no doubt, more than interested to find out all its potential enemies. The elections and census planned for 1937 were the best opportunity to do this. However, to the chagrin of the Soviet regime, the results of the census of 1937 proved to be unsatisfactory.

The census itself was initiated in the same propagandistic style as the Constitution of 1936 and Stalin took a personal interest in this

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- 22 "....В связи с принятием новой Конституции СССР многие священники очень активизировались: они проводят энергичную кампанию за открытие закрытых прежде церковей, собирают средства на их ремонт и обновление, даже составляют тезисы для проповедей и бесед на тему Конституции..." *Bolshevik* 1937, No. 4, 35. "Антирелигиозная пропаганда в современных условиях."
- 23 See examples of the complaints sent to the VtsIK and Kalinin. The attitudes expressed in these complaints and petitions seemed to be now (after the adoption of the new Constitution) more decisive. See especially GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 41. See also GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d.45, (pkvk 8/21.8.-36). ВР 1937, No. 7–8. 3. "Шире развернуть пропаганду избирательного закона!"; See the enthusiastic letter of the priest Aleksei Pospelov in which he glorifies Stalin and declares his total loyalty to him for having created such a Constitution. RTsKhIDNI f.17, op. 120, d. 256, l. 42–44. "Иосифу Виссарионовичу СТАЛИНУ." See also ВР 1937, No.9–10, 11. "Печать и выборы в Верховный Совет СССР."
- 24 On the accounts of the émigré observers, N.N. Alekseev: *Куда итти? К вопросу о новой советской конституции*. Издание Евразийцев. Petropolis-Verlag A.G. Berlin. 1936; S.I. Varshavsky: *Новая Советская Конституция*. Содержание ее. мотивы и истинный смысл. Библиотека Хуторь. Прага. 1936; B.V. Tryurkin: *Церковь и государство*. Под редакцией Идеологической Комиссии РНСУВ. Издательство "Голос России." Sofia. 1939.
- 25 *Pravda*, 13 October 1937, No. 283(7249). "Информационное сообщение об очередном пленуме ЦК ВКП(б)."

survey. The reasons for conducting a census to begin with were ambiguous. On the one hand, the government needed authentic information on the populace. On the other hand, there was an ideological tendency to "improve" the results of this survey in order to fulfil the prophecies made by Khozyain and to verify the successes of communism in Russia. Especially, question No. 5 concerning religion was regarded as a question of loyalty to the Soviet regime. The head of the census, I. A. Kraval (1897–1938), stated in one of his articles that, among other things, the census of 1937, should demonstrate the "successes" that the Soviet regime had gained in its fight against religious remnants. In order to obtain "good" results, question No. 5 was reduced to a question of loyalty - concerning one's personal conviction. It would take a certain amount of extra courage for someone to give a "religious answer" to this question. It is no wonder that wild rumours started to circulate in connection with this census. As Felix Corley has remarked²⁶, many ordinary people were convinced that this census and the recording of believers was a signal for a new, more merciless persecution.²⁷

Despite all efforts the census gave too "unsatisfactory" results and it was proposed that the survey should be rectified again later. As usual, the guilty leaders (such as Kraval and others) were purged and executed later.²⁸ New leaders were then nominated to lead this survey. As mentioned earlier, the results of the 1937 census had been too "misleading" and unsatisfactory for the Stalinist leadership. The information, on the one hand, was too realistic in the eyes of the Soviet regime. On the other hand, local officials were more than interested to know the real results of the census in order to discover

26 Corley 1994, 405–410.

27 *Bolshevik* 1936, No.21, 43, 46. "Всесоюзная перепись населения 1937 г.." See also *Izvestiya*, January 4 1937, No. 3 (6165); *Izvestiya*, January 8 1937, No.6(6168) "Как прошла перепись." As Prof. V. Stepanov underlined in his article about the future census of 1937, the outcome of this sociological survey was already quite certain. "...Перепись должна показать те огромные сдвиги, которые произошли в нашей стране со времени Великой Социалистической Революции до настоящего момента, сдвиги, которыми страна обязана мудрости и твердому руководству Коммунистической Партии и ее гениальных вождей Ленина и Сталина." *Izvestiya*, January 4 1937, No. 3 (6165) "В былые годы." See also RSS, 304–307 "Rapport du directeur département des Statistiques économiques de Biélorussie sur les rumeurs contre-révolutionnaires concernant le recensement."

28 Usually, victims of purges were executed secretly and these people simply disappeared. Merridale 1996, 5.



D. MOOR.

Нити черные измены
В Ватикан, таясь, подзуд...
Там хозяи их «смирный»
Наградит шпionoв труд.

Но замкнули мы границы,
И напрасно папа ждет:
От Ежовой рукавицы
Крест шпиона не спасет.

"...cross does not save the spy from the iron rule of Ezhov." A caricature by Dimitry Moor. It is composed in the form of a Russian "chastushka." Source: Bezbozhnik 1937, No. 11.

"suspect elements." Consequently, because of these disappointing results the whole census was annulled and the survey was re-run later in 1939. In order to make sure that the results of this survey would now satisfy the leadership of the party, the new leaders of the census organized a massive campaign. Both the Soviet people at large and the people conducting this survey received better instructions and the notorious question No. 5 was amended: "in what social group do you belong; are you a worker...or servant of a religious organization or do you belong to non-working elements of the population."²⁹ This time the results of this survey were more "convincing" in respect of religion.

However, the constitution of 1936 and census of 1937 reveal the basic problematics of the Stalinist regime: the question of loyalty and potential disloyalty. The question of who would betray the Soviet system proved to be the most burning challenge and it seemed that the whole Stalinist society was now distinguishing the sheep from the goats! During the late 1930s, it appeared that whole Soviet regime was in quest of potential Judas-candidates, trying to detect those who had no faith in the Communist dogma. For example, the Soviet officials were extremely worried over the possibility that the former *lishentsy* would be able to participate in elections and be elected to Soviets. So in response to this fear, the Soviet newspapers started a powerful campaign against those people to whom the Constitution had already guaranteed all political rights. The nature of these campaigns seemed to emphasize that the Soviet regime expected 101% support and loyalty – total control of its people.³⁰

This pathological fear of "potential enemies" was the driving force everywhere in the Soviet society. The Communist party stressed that

29 *Izvestiya*, January 3 1937, No. 2 (6164) "Всесоюзная перепись населения." *Izvestiya*, May 24 1938, No. 119(6586). "Перепись 1939 года." See also SPR, No. 35, 15 August, 1938 "О Всесоюзной переписи населения 1939 года"; PS 1938, No. 16, 15 August, 15–22. According to Corley (he refers to Kolarz 1961, 12–13), it is likely that the Soviet antireligious movement suffered purges, partly, on account of this ineffectiveness shown by the census. Corley 1994, 410.

30 See examples, *Bolshevik* 1937, No. 5–6, 6–9. "Подготовка партийных организаций к выборам в Верховный Совет СССР по новой избирательной системе и соответствующая перестройка партийно-политической работы. Доклад тов. Жданова на пленуме ЦК ВКП(б) 26 февраля 1937 г."; *Bolshevik* 1937, No. 14, 21–23. "Самый демократический избирательный закон"; *Bolshevik* 1937, No. 18, 38. "Боевые задачи политической агитации." See also *Pravda*, 9 October, 1937, No. 279(7245) "Райком партии бездействует, церковники распоясались." See also how in 1939 there was an attempt to "correct" the earlier census of 1937. KG 1939, No.10(6281).

the purges and all extraordinary measures were justified by the future war and the people could not but yield. Moreover, with so many lurking enemies the Stalinist ideology justified the purges and all following extraordinary measures against the people by the coming war;³¹ in which the Western capitalists would try to entice potential traitors from the Soviet side. Thus the Soviet security organs were trying to root out the phalanges of possible traitors and wreckers. In fact, when questioning the loyalties of the Soviet population, the Soviet regime was especially interested in knowing those who were addicted to such vices as religion and nationality. So this quest to detect potential enemies was pervaded everywhere and the competing loyalties were regarded as mortal sin. For example, according to hysteric newspaper articles, the ecclesiastical organizations seemed to be lurking everywhere and were especially busy infiltrating recruits and officers of the Red Army. These "horror stories" claimed that religious people and organizations were cunningly trying to steal the loyalty of the Red Army conscripts.³²

This desperate hunt for enemies and spies was more energetic in those areas where the real enemies were supposed to be more active, i.e. on Soviet borders. Consequently, the priests and mullahs in these areas were regarded as spies of foreign intelligence services. As a rule, these nests of spies, constantly being discovered, were always near the borders of the Soviet Union. According to the Soviet media, the Japanese, German and Polish intelligence services had eagerly trained special religious agents to spy. More notoriously, these wicked enemies had utilized especially Orthodox priests as their secret agents inside the Soviet Union. Moreover, as a sign of this paranoia, the Red

31 Fitzpatrick 1994, 213–214. The prospects of a coming war were discussed in several Soviet newspapers. Especially the newspaper of the Red Army, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, mentioned in every number that a war was inevitable.

32 As seen in this document, the Soviet ruling regime was anxious to seek out all conscripts with connections to "alien elements or, "lishentsy." However, it is remarkable that only 332 conscripts out of 63,781 turned out to be people of "alien- class-origin" or "criminals"; and only 3 of them were registered as "religious." See, for example, RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 120, d. 87, l. 4. "Агитмассовому отделу ЦК ВКП (б)." The head of the SVB, Yaroslavsky openly stated that the purpose of the antireligious work inside the army was to detect the loyalties of the conscripts, to find out who had an ecclesiastical background, who was a believer, who had connections to ecclesiastical organizations. KZ, 8 July 1938, No. 155(4005). "Об антирелигиозной работе в Красной Армии."

Army newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* published many letters from readers in which the "ordinary readers" complained that some of the personnel of the Red Army regarded the "authority of the church higher than the laws."³³

The hunt for potential traitors together with Stalin's pseudo-liberal reforms, devastated the activity of the Cult Commission in Moscow during its last phase in 1936-1938. While it tried to adapt itself to the Stalinist reforms, it was busy in justifying its existence inside the Soviet bureaucracy. Its main field of activity was, as before, to consolidate its authority over the local officials. However, the purges and reforms paralysed this organ and gradually the Soviet administration engulfed this Stalinist consistency of unbelief.

3. "Just before the sunset" – CSCRQ struggling with defects and purges

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At the same time as Soviet society was desperately seeking out its potential enemies, the officials of the Cult Commission in Moscow were seriously trying to find ways of getting information from the provinces. The urgency to rectify the misdeeds of local officials was now emphasized in the official statistics and reports of the Cult Commission. The secret summary of the activity of the Cult Commission was, as we have seen, one of the most candid accounts concerning the activities of this organ. The report made in 1936 clearly acknowledged the "defects" of this commission, such as a lack of trained personnel and a lack of means to enforce its policies inside the Soviet Union. Moreover, it reveals that there prevailed a intolerable situation concerning the rights of believers. Even this document made by the Soviet officials themselves stressed that in the provinces there prevailed "grave violations of the Soviet legislation"

33 KZ, 17 June 1937, No. 163(3711) "Мещанин." See also KZ, 4 August 1937, No. 178(3726). "Мракобесы не дремлют"; KZ 1937, No. 180(3728) "Мулла шпион"; KZ, 9 January 1938, No. 7(3857). "Попы-шпионы"; KZ, 22 July 1938, No. 167(4017) "Шпионы в рясах." See also KG 1938, No. 25(5995) "Главаря церковников"; KG, 27 August 1938, No.248(6218). "В Суде. Процесс сектантов- контрреволюционеров." On Soviet legislation in 1936 concerning the penalties for espionage and for utilizing "religious or nationalistic relics in propaganda and agitation; see UK, 25, 28, 30, 35. Compare this with the earlier law from 1933: UKR, 24, 28.

concerning the religious cults (...На основании всех имеющихся материалов в Комиссии необходимо отметить большое количество грубых нарушений советского законодательства о религиозных культах на местах...) This report emphasized that the "mistakes and administrative" methods of antireligious work had a destructive effect on those areas where "religious prejudices" were still strong. The list of mistakes made by local organizations was lengthy; one mistake was that local officials were too lenient and passive in relation to different religions. As this notorious report put it, local officials "did not often grasp politics in depth." These local party leaders and officials had no antireligious activity at all in their regions and they just excused it by mentioning that "religion had already perished" or "only old people (старики, старухи) were practising it." As this report claimed, the whole activity was following "machine-like order" (аппаратном порядке) Moreover, when the CSCRQ made formal request on the situation of the confiscated churches, the local officials usually justified their actions by saying that the former religious premises were now in good use or were intended to be transformed into something useful.³⁴

According to this archival document, local officials were a too brutal in relation to religious organizations. The problem was, as this document revealed, that the local satraps were totally unaware of Soviet laws or interpreted them incorrectly. Moreover, this report claimed that this brutal and nontactical attitude of the local Soviet executives was apparent in many practical matters; for example, churches were demanded to pay taxes in bread, churches were closed because of an alleged "epidemy", church bells were confiscated and local officials were taxing (summoned overtaxes) religious organizations with a heavy hand, etc. To sum up, churches were closed without proper knowledge of the local religious situation or preliminary antireligious campaigns. The situation inside the SVB

34 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 32, fol. 1 "Введение"; GARF f.5263, op.1, d. 52, l. 1-68." This report is published, see RPTsKG, 310. "Докладная записка о состоянии религиозных организаций в СССР. отношения их к проекту новой конституции. работа комиссии культов ЦИК СССР и практике проведения законодательства о религиозных культах." For the critical report made by I.N. Uzkov, see RSS, 296-304. "Rapport de mission dans la région de Voronej de I.N. Uzkov, consultant-instructeur de la Commission des cultes auprès du Comité exécutif central à P.A. Krassikov, président de la Commission des cultes."

movement was even more desperate; as this report quite discreetly put it "the SVB was still undergoing its period of getting organized." Actually, the real worry of Moscow was that the meaningless destruction of the churches and parishes would entice believers to form secret religious groups. Literally, fear of the Soviet regime for unofficial religious meetings proved beneficial to the official ROC. Consequently, fearing the loss of control forced the officials in Moscow to supervise the local officials – often with poor results.³⁵

The main guilt and responsibility for these mistakes were once again placed on the shoulders of local officials, who, according to this report, suffered from "political short-sightedness" in questions related to religion and causing "serious consequences" in the Soviet countryside. As a main problem, this report recognized the "short-sighted political viewpoints" of the local satraps; in some cases, local officials were just convinced that religion was for old people or that it would wither away of its own accord. This document also gives a frank picture of the disorder and chaos prevailing at the grass-roots level of the local Cult Commissions. Firstly, the network of the local CSCRQ commissions was not nationwide; as a matter of fact there was many local organs, autonomous republics, krais and oblasts where there were no local Cult Commission at all. A natural outcome of this chaos was, as this report often stressed, that all local matters related to religion were decided by administrative order (в аппаратном порядке). Moreover, in the places where the local Cult Commission was actually functioning, it only dealt with questions concerning the closure of churches, etc. Nevertheless, it was the central Cult Commission that came under heavy fire: according to this report, the Cult Commission in Moscow did not bother to give any systematic instructions to *raions*. According to this rather murderous critique, the central bureaucrats of this commission did not help locals in any way or did not supervise the grass-roots level of their own people in the provinces.³⁶

35 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 32, rol.1 "Введение"; Alexeev 1979, 30.

36 "...Комиссии не занимаются изучением вопроса, соответствующей информацией президиумов край-, облизполкомов, не занимаются систематическим инструктированием рик'ов, не помогают им, не следят систематически за правильным проведением в районах законодательства о культах." GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 32, rol. 1 "Введение"; GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 52, l. 1–68." . See also RPT'sKG, 310–311. "Докладная записка о состоянии религиозных организаций в СССР. отношения их к проекту

Disappointingly enough, this report acknowledged that the main functions of the local Cult Commissions were usually dealt with by the local NKVD, i.e., terror. And as a rule, believer's petitions were simply treated with brutality. As this report put it, there prevailed a local anarchy in these matters; in some cases an individual church was closed down by the decision of the village Soviet chairman. The defects this report list were numerous. For instance, as a typical incident a certain chairman of the one individual *rik* (районный исполнительный комитет) named Lapshin decided to take down (разборка) the local church before the decision of the local *oblispolkom*. Despite the protests coming from the local Soviet procurator, this stubborn Lapshin did not bother to change his policy towards the doomed church.³⁷

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These numerous accounts of defects and misdeeds proved fatal for this commission. The leading role of the Cult Commission in Moscow met with escalating criticism from the higher party officials. Although the party's religious-political organ, CAP, had been dissolved earlier, the party had preserved its special "Section of Culture and Enlightenment", SCE (Отдел Культпросветработы), which took interest in Soviet religious policy. Moreover, as can be seen from documents from the early 1930s, the Gensec himself had been interested in leading Soviet cultural questions when members of the Politburo divided duties among themselves.³⁸

When examining these reports, it seems to be likely that the whole system of Cult Commissions was gradually exposed to criticism. Especially the "non-existing" atheist activity of the Cult Commission raised the eyebrows of the apparatchik's. As a sign of this increasing suspicion was a special memorandum written by the party's authoritative "Section of Culture and Enlightenment" – SCE. According to this memo, delivered in 1937, religious organizations were prospering and "the special commission which was supposed to

новой конституции. работа комиссии культов ЦИК СССР и практике проведения законодательства о религиозных культах."

37 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 32, fol. 1 "Введение"; GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 52, l. 1–68." See also, RPTsKG, 311–316. "Докладная записка о состоянии религиозных организаций в СССР, отношения их к проекту новой конституции. работа комиссии культов ЦИК СССР и практике проведения законодательства о религиозных культах."

38 SPG, 141. "Постановление Политбюро о распределении обязанностей между секретарями ЦК. 4 июня 1934."

conduct this work" (it meaning the Cult Commission) was in fact doing nothing and had no authority whatsoever among the Soviet officials.³⁹

This criticism presented by the SCE struck heavily on the Cult Commission and the SVB movement. Both were regarded as guilty of weak performance in the antireligious propaganda when the SCE painted the religious political situation in the Soviet Union with dark colours. According to this gloomy report concerning "the cultural and enlightenment work" in the Russian countryside, the majority of the kolhozники in the Russian countryside were still illiterate and non-political. Moreover, ordinary people were still under the influence of religious relics; they were baptizing their children and suffering from "dirt, sicknesses, icons, alcoholism..."⁴⁰ Moreover, according to this report, believers were utilizing weaknesses in this commission and were engaged in an active fight against the collective farms. For example, the Buddhist Lamas were conducting their religious festivals in order to instigate Japan's "holy war" against the Soviet Union, etc. However, as this report stressed, the local party organs (sic!) were trying to organize antireligious activity. In fact, the local party officials had not been able to follow the ambiguous instructions given to them by the Cult Commission. So it was understandable that this would lead to chaos; while the local officials were trying to do their best in fighting against religion, their administrative methods often aided the revitalization of religion. Those really guilty, however, of the weak implementation of the antireligious work were not the local comrades but people in the Cult Commission and in SVB movement.⁴¹

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- 39 "...Комиссии по делам культов при ЦИК республик и исполкомах краев и областей. призванные наблюдать за правильным осуществлением советского законодательства по вопросам религии и разрешать спорные вопросы в этой области - бездействуют и с ними никто не считается." RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 120, d. 256, l. 39-40. "Записка отдела культпросвет-работы ЦК ВКП(б) (Тамаркин, Эпштейн) секретарям ЦК ВКП(б). тов. Кагановичу Л.М., тов. Андрееву, А.А., тов. Ежову Н.И. о состоянии антирелигиозной работы. Февраль 1937."
- 40 See RTsKhIDNI f.17, op.120, d. 200, l.102, "Секретарям ЦК ВКП(б). Тов. Сталину И.В., тов. Кагановичу, тов. Жданову А.А., тов. Андрееву А.А. тов. Ежову Н.И. О состоянии культурно-просветительной работы в деревне."
- 41 RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 120, d. 256, l. 38-41. "Записка отдела культпросвет-работы ЦК ВКП(б) (Тамаркин, Эпштейн) секретарям ЦК ВКП(б). тов. Кагановичу Л.М., тов. Андрееву, А.А., тов. Ежову Н.И. о состоянии антирелигиозной работы. Февраль 1937."

The story of this report bears the hallmarks of the reign of terror. When explaining weaknesses and excesses this report believes that it was the "enemies of the people" who had been able to nullify the real work of SVB activists; according to this report, the League had been plagued by "sabotage, counter-revolutionary and avant-garde elements." The damage had nearly crippled Soviet atheist activity totally; this report summarized the damage by calculating that during the period of 1934–36 "enemies of people" had penetrated to the Leningrad, Ukraine, Crimea, Uzbekistan, Saratov, and Arkhangelsk SVB organizations.⁴² Exposure of many of these critical evaluations of the ineffectiveness of the Soviet atheist work, made it look as the whole atheist movement were on the verge of collapse at that time. The general tone of these accusations is always the same; the Cult Commission did nothing and the Bezbozhniks were "lazy" and did little in antireligious propaganda.

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Another interesting feature in the late history of the CSCSRQ was its increasing emphasis on restricting the most brutal antireligious actions of the local vigilantes. As a matter of fact, the increasing suspicion of the Cult Commission and the desire to restrict the local officials go hand in hand.

The Cult Commission had started to make efforts against atheist zealots and their arbitrary activism in the early 1930s; from the "good years" of the 1930s the Cult Commission had tried to pacify the local party zealots. This "moderate" stand of the CSCSRQ is even more striking when compared with the material coming from archives and the opinions presented by some modern authors. According to archival material, the central organs of the Soviet regime were actually trying to restrict the voluntary activities of the local organs. The Cult Commission urged several times that the national republics should

42 RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 120, d. 256, l. 38–41. "Записка отдела культпросвет-работы ЦК ВКП(б) (Тамаркин, Эпштейн) секретарям ЦК ВКП(б) тов. Кагановичу Л.М., тов. Андрееву, А.А., тов. Ежову Н.И. о состоянии антирелигиозной работы. Февраль 1937." See also GARF f. 5407. op. 1, d. 107 "О вредительстве в СББ." See also the grave evaluations of the activity of the SVB movement: "...Союз воинствующих безбожников работает архи-плохо, за последние годы свернул свою деятельность. В ряде областей отделения союза развалились, растеряли свой актив, засорены чуждыми людьми..." Pravda, 7 May 1937, No. 124(7090) "Антирелигиозная пропаганда." See also Pravda, 5 April 1937, No. 94(7060) "Бездействующие безбожники." See also ВР 1937, No.2-3, 11. "Печать и антирелигиозная пропаганда."

correct their mistakes in religious policy. For example, in its letter to the chairman of the TsIK of the Belorussian republic, A.G. Chervyakov (1892–1937), the Cult Commission in Moscow strongly advised local officials in Belorussia to stop their brutalities when dealing with religious organizations. As comrades in Moscow stressed, the principle of liquidating prayer houses in order to destroy them later was no wise policy and these brutal actions only helped the "hostile class elements." These believers would then utilize these mistakes for their own anti-Soviet purposes.⁴³

As pointed out, this "unauthorized activity" was seen as a major setback in the secret annual report summarizing the activities of the CSCRQ in 1936. To sum up, the Cult Commission saw that the main error of the local workers was their "the unauthorized (samowolxnoe) actions" in respect of religious organizations. As a certain circular letter to all the local party organs, such as the oblastkoms, kraispolkoms and TsIK's of the autonomous republics stressed, all unauthorized actions against religion were supposed to stop. As a matter of fact, the Cult Commission demanded that people "guilty" of such brutal actions were to be put under "legal charge."⁴⁴

So should this contrast between the aforementioned realistic documents and the pompous antireligious declarations issued for public use be interpreted merely as the result of an ordinary Bolshevik practice of falsifying the truth? On the one hand, this inconsistency can be resolved by visualizing the Marxist interpretation of reality. If the realistic information from the provinces constituted an objective truth, then Soviet propaganda amounted to class truth. It was the ideal world of the party. On the other hand, the fact remains that the Cult

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- 43 Again the "local workers" had to assume the main responsibility for "excesses." See, for example, "...У нас создается мнение, что местные работники увлекаются этим делом и недоучитывают того вреда, который приносят всякие перегибы. Они предпочитают массово-разъяснительной работе методы административного нажима на религиозные организации и служителей культа и тем самым пытаются покончить с религией." GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 21 "Председателю ЦИК"а Белорусской ССР тов. Червякову А.Г. 8.10.1936." See also GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 21 "Председателю ЦИК"а Украинской ССР тов. Петровскому Г.И. 8.10.1936."
- 44 "...необходимо положить конец этим нарушениям советского законодательства и советской политики...в области планомерной, опирающейся на рост активности самих трудящихся борьбы с религиозными пережитками." GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 21 "Циркуляр. Всем областкомам, крайисполкомам и ЦИК"ам АССР."

Commission and the Soviet regime were desperately aware of the real situation in the field and had a real concern to gain control of the situation in the provinces. Unfortunately, these efforts of the Bolsheviks to bring local oblasts into line were something that had also posed a problem for other rulers of Russia before them.

The fact is that the central Cult Commission in Moscow was aware of defects in the provinces but it could only criticize these features. On the one hand, the Soviet criminal law concerning religious offences was quite strict: the activity of the religious organizations should be kept to the confines of church buildings.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that the rulers were mainly concerned to keep the local officials and the masses of believers under control. It may seem quite peculiar but when detecting the archival documents, it was only very seldom, as during the Cultural Revolution or Great Purges, that they were ready to carry out coordinated religious persecutions *per se*. Without proper material stimulus or something to loot such as the metal from the church bells or valuable items, the central officials in Moscow favoured less belligerent solutions in relation to believers. The logic of the central official in Moscow was simple: if the closure of some churches were executed with brutal procedures, the believers would consider this only as an illegal act and would join "counter-revolutionary groupings." This was regarded more dangerous than the membership in the official ROC.⁴⁶ However, it was no wonder that the influence of the central Cult Commission started to decline dramatically in the late 1930s and that members of the commission did not bother to show up at the regular meetings of the CSCRQ. Krasikov, Borisov and Oleshchuk were the last Mohicans in this commission. The final countdown for the closing down of this commission had already started inside the ruling party and the Great Terror sealed the fate of the Cult Commission.⁴⁷

45 UK, 64–65. See especially § 127.

46 GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d.45, (pkvk 6/10.5.-36).

47 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d.47, rol.2.

4. Purges and crippling antireligious activity

The purges had a devastating impact on the work of the Cult Commission and especially on the activity of the Soviet Godless movement. The purges escalated in three phases: the so-called ordinary purge of 1932–1933 inside the party. In 1934–1935 physical terror was initiated on a large scale after the murder of Kirov; massive killings started after 1936 and at the last phase, 1936–1938, the feared *troiki* of the NKVD were revived. On July 1937, the terror was expanding to people who could hardly be described as opponents of the party or the Soviet system.

The religious organizations suffered again and with severe consequences. Now, during the Great Purges, after somewhat milder years of Soviet religious policy, the terror was introduced systematically against the servants of the cults. Especially during its last phase, masses of believers, priests, bishops, and also sectarians, were dispatched to the Gulag or to execution chambers in large numbers. The reason for this new persecution was evident: as Robert W. Thurston has remarked, in 1937, Stalin turned against anyone and the "usual suspects", such as priests and *lishentsy*, were too good a target for this new wave of terror.⁴⁸

The actual process of the Great Terror was, however, quite slow. The password of the year 1935 had been – "vigilance." The calls for vigilance and alertness appeared everywhere in Soviet newspapers. As a sign of this proletarian witch hunt, armies of party ideologists started to search for "heretical" opinions everywhere, only to perish later themselves. To demonstrate the profound nature of this new *chistka*, we could take a revealing example: nearly all earlier Soviet publications and works on Marxist philosophy and ideology were now criticized for being too soft. Suddenly in 1935, the party realized that it had been guilty of not maintaining proper vigilance. This shock realization was evident also in the Soviet antireligious activity: earlier antireligious literature was put under a microscope; especially the

48 Thurston 1996, 62. See this list of "usual" enemies, who were chosen to be victims during the latest phase of the great terror: "...наиболее активные антисоветские элементы из бывших кулаков, карателей, бандитов, белых, сектантских активистов, церковников и прочих, содержащихся в тюрьмах, лагерях, трудовых поселках и колониях." LM, 43.

works of former "Mechanists" and ex-oppositionists were given special attention.⁴⁹

The *chistka* escalated to actual purges when S.M. Kirov was murdered. The actual process of arrests followed its own pattern; on December 1, 1934, Leonid V. Nikolaev assassinated Kirov in the corridors of Smolny, Leningrad. The highest leadership of the Soviet Union reacted to this act with a strong expression of sorrow and solidarity.⁵⁰ The "Kirov murderers" were now arrested in great numbers and Stalin himself arrived to Leningrad to head the investigations and issued a decree that demanded the death penalty for terrorist acts.⁵¹

Immediately after Kirov's murder, the Soviet press launched a campaign of vigilance and called for the exposure of all hidden enemies. Moreover, the Central Committee of the party issued a secret letter, "Lesson of the Events Connected With The Evil Murder of Comrade Kirov", and had sent it to all the party committees around the Soviet Union.⁵²

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49 See example, PZM 1935, No. 1, 196–201. "Полшага вперед и топтанье на месте."

50 See Levytsky 1974, 37–40.

51 Conquest 1971, 72–82. In the opinion of many historians, Kirov's murder was conspired by Stalin himself. The practical plot to murder Kirov (assisting, arming and instructing Nikolaev) was organized by Genrich Yagoda and Ivan Zaporozhets, leaders of the Soviet security police. Conquest 1971, 74–77. However, the idea of presenting Kirov as a "soft" or "liberal" Soviet leader who would have been a better option for Stalin is problematic. As Arch Getty has stated, Kirov had been in charge of Leningrad during the brutalities of collectivization, he had supervised the rooting out of communist opposition, and during his reign churches were destroyed more than during that of Zinovev or Zhdanov. Getty 1993b, 44.

52 The victim of this purge had anyhow already been decided; Kirov's murder was a pretext for Stalin to settle old scores with his own party. Kirov's murderer, Leonid Nikolaev, according to many historians, was a mole inspired by Yagoda, the head of the NKVD. Nikolaev was executed after short interrogations. However, the main role of scapegoat was reserved to the phalanx of old leaders of the communist opposition – mainly Zinovev and Kamenev. Both of these men had been expelled various times but before 1934 they had been always readmitted to the party. Now the so-called "Kirov Purge" escalated as a more bloody *krypteia* against all levels of the ruling regime inside the party and state. Moreover, the so-called *proverka*, exchange of party documents in 1936, was transformed to a last phase of the Great Purge in 1936. Throughout the end of 1934, the Soviet press and security forces had discovered "hirelings" of notorious assassins. The Leningrad party organization and those related to the accused old oppositionists were the second victims of the purge. So-called "Kirov's murderers" were arrested and deported *en masse* and thousands of those associated with the former opposition perished in the Gulag. Conquest 1986, 85–86.

Kirov's murder was the signal for the commencement of terror and persecution against the whole political the opposition inside the Soviet Union, including also religious organizations. During the worst mass hysteria after Kirov's murder nearly all religious organizations (among other suspects) were regarded as directly or indirectly responsible, either assisting in the wicked murder or at least supporting it in some other way. As a good example of the mass hysteria, we have a letter from the members of the Komsomols and pioneers from the Petrogradsky raion (Leningrad) in which they appealed to Zhdanov, the new party leader of the city, to close the church of St. Vladimir because their own parents were "just running to church from dawn to dusk and did not let the children go to school."⁵³

The systematic purge against "the enemies of the people" crippled the Soviet antireligious movement and the work of the CSCRQ; especially the personnel and cadres of the SVB movement were under heavy fire. A few of these people had worked also inside the Cult Commission. Among these first victims was the distinguished leader of the SVB-Leningrad party organizations, N.M. Matorin. Matorin was found guilty without any deeper scrutiny; it is likely that the main reason for his discovery was his past acquaintance with Zinovev, who was one of the main victims in this purge. As the periodical, *Antireligioznik*, put it...

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"...At the head of the SVB Leningrad organization stood for a long time a double-dealer, Zinovievite Matorin, who actually was many times expelled from the party owing to his activity in the opposition."⁵⁴

53 SPI, 68. "Анонимное письмо "Комсомольцев и пионеров" Петроградского района А.А. Жданову с просьбой закрыть собор кн. Владимира. Ранее 9 февраля 1935 г."

54 "Во главе ленинградской организации воинствующих безбожников в течение долгого времени стоял двурушник зинovieвец Маторин, который за оппозиционную деятельность несколько раз исключался из партии и при своем последнем восстановлении, как это выяснилось на партчистке 1933г. ещё сохранял зинovieвские установки по целому ряду вопросов. Маторин выведен из состава членов Центрального и Ленинградского областного советов безбожников." AR 1935, No. 1, 8. "С.М. Киров как революционер и безбожник." б/а. The case of Matorin was dealt with later; the information sheet of the *Antireligioznik* simply reported that N.M. Matorin was officially expelled from the Central Council of the SVB movement and from the ranks of the party. AR 1935, No. 2, 41. "Хроника. Решения рабочего Президиума ЦС СВБ." б/а. See also how any lucid ideas about being generous

Earlier, the communist criticism had been conducted much more leniently. For example, when the Leningrad organization of the SVB had been attacked in 1932, the criticism had contained also some "positive" features.⁵⁵ Now after Kirov's murder, there was hardly anything positive to mention concerning the Leningrad SVB movement. The leader of the Leningrad SVB organization, Matorin, was only the first significant victim and the witch hunt instigated by the leadership of the party spread vertically into the party hierarchy. All those who had had any close contact with Matorin or had been working with him were now in danger of perishing. However, at this point, only the Leningrad SVB was considered as the headquarters of the "counter-revolution" and the criticism was directed against the "failures" of the SVB in Leningrad.

However, the circle of the accused ones was spreading; A. Lukachevsky, the vice-leader of the SVB, was at that time presiding over certain SVB meeting in Sverdlovsk when the resolution of this meeting condemned "enemies of the people" responsible for Kirov's murder. Nevertheless, in his speech, Lukachevsky was optimistic and praised the achievements of the SVB movement, something that perhaps accelerated his sudden fall in disgrace. Perhaps, in the atmosphere of self-criticism there was no place for overconfident leaders such as Lukachevsky, who actually had moved along with the official Bolshevik dogma condemning both "leftist mistakes" and "opportunist convictions." However, the congress acknowledged that there were other enemies of people than Matorin "lurking behind the SVB." According to this resolution certain people such as Matorin, M.N. Pokrovsky (1868–1932)⁵⁶ (sic!), Sigorin etc. had been

or ideas of "mercy upon the enemies" were considered as harmful. As the newspaper *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* put it, the "Proletarian Humanism" did not include any traces of "Christian Humanism"; enemies should be treated without mercy. PZM 1935, No. 4, 10. "Пролетарский гуманизм." Передовая. See also *Bezbozhnik* 1936, No. 9, 4. "Московскому комитету ВКП(б). Резолюция общего собрания сотрудников ЦС СВБ Московского Совета СВБ и Государственного антирелигиозного издательства" and *Bolshevik* 1937, No. 1, 19. "Самая демократическая конституция в мире."

55 Lanin 1932, 98.

56 If the resolution points at the late M.N. Pokrovsky, this was the first and the last time when his name was mentioned. If this was the writer's intention, Pokrovsky was among the first ones to be ostracized posthumously. In any event, the publication of Pokrovsky's works had ceased in 1934 and it was not until 1936 that Stalin himself characterized the so-called "Pokrovsky school of historiography" as "erroneous." Moreover, his old colleagues, N.M. Lukin and

conducting their harmful activity inside the SVB.⁵⁷

However, the reign of terror was spreading rapidly and had also reached the Cult Commission. According to a certain report issued inside the central Cult Commission, the whole SVB organization had been infested with "counter-revolutionary, Trotskyite-Zinovievites and criminal elements." The report stated that these elements had been discovered the previous year in Ukraine, the Leningrad oblast, Georgia, Crimea, the Kuibyshev oblast, the Western oblast."⁵⁸

In fact, the next category of victims in the Soviet antireligious movement were to meet their destiny when an editorial in the *Antireligioznik* proclaimed that "trotskyite-zinovievites" Matorin and Sigorin were enemies (now comes the notorious phrase – "и их приспешниками") "together with their followers." This phrase put the blame on all those who were still continuing their work inside the SVB movement.⁵⁹ However, this was nothing compared with forthcoming revelations at the great political trial against Trotskyites

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P.O. Gorin (both had been active in the party's antireligious campaigns in the 1920s) were liquidated in the purges. Keep 1995, 390. See also Enteen 1984, 159–168.

- 57 "Было показано на ряде конкретных фактов, как халатно относимся мы к выдаче членского билета СВБ...он попадает в руки классого врага, который прикрывает им свою контрреволюционную деятельность, как это было с Маториным, Покровским, Сигориным в Ленинграде и т.д." Soldatov 1935, 37. At this time, the main lecture of this meeting was held by Lukachevsky. Soldatov eulogized Lukachevsky with accolades such as..."В своем докладе т. Лукачевский очень ярко и красочно показал те громадные достижения в области социалистического строительства, которых добились рабочие и колхозники в нашей стране под руководством коммунистической партии и любимого вождя всех трудящихся т. Сталина." Soldatov 1935, 37. Criticism against the SVB movement during 1936. See PZM 1936, No. 2–3, 90–91. "О наших задачах на антирелигиозном фронте." However, it seemed that the remorseful waves of self-criticism were the best guarantee against blind terror; for example, an editorial in the journal *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* repented and blamed itself of being too weak in antireligious work. PZM 1937, No. 3, 14–15. "К 15-летию статьи В. Ленина "О значении воинствующего материализма." See also other accusations against Matorin and Pokrovsky. PZM 1935, No. 2, 11–12. "За большевистскую бдительность." Передовая.
- 58 "...Ряд фактов за последний год показывают наибольшую засоренность аппаратов советов СВБ контр-революционным троцкистско-зиновьевским и уголовным элементом (ЦС СВБ Украины, Ленинградский облсовет, ЦС Грузии, ЦС Крыма, Куйбышевский облсовет, Западный облсовет и др.)." GARF f. 5263, op. 1, 32 rol.1 "Wwedenie."
- 59 AR 1935, No. 5. 43. "Перестройка работы СВБ в связи с упразднением платных работников в районах."

and Zinovievites; on June 26, the Central Committee of the party sent a secret letter to local organizations concerning "the terrorist activities of the trotskyite-zinovievite counter-revolutionary bloc." The Zinoviev-Kamenev trial took place in August and the outcome was that all the 16 accused were executed. The accusations in party newspapers foreshadowed a new round of purges. The main architect of Kirov's murder, Yagoda, was removed from his post of as a Commissar of the NKVD and given a minor position (later executed) and replaced by N.I. Ezhov (1895–1939). The Politburo now ordered with the total annihilation of the "opposition" with its decree "Concerning the counter-revolutionary trotskyite-zinovievite elements."⁶⁰

As seen above, the reign of terror had started vertically and spread in cyclic waves; those who perished first were living in Leningrad. An alleged friendship or relations with one of the cursed "enemies of the people" was enough to prove guilt. For example, according to the angry editorial of the newspaper *Antireligioznik*, Matorin had actually been Zinoviev's former personal secretary, was aware of the plans to murder Kirov, and actually been involved in it. As an actual "Zinoviev's genuine disciple" in "double-dealing and hypocrisy", Matorin had participated in the obsequies for "our dear Sergei Mironovich" and, as an act of duplicity, he had cursed those who had murdered Kirov.⁶¹

Later, F.N. Oleshchuk – one of the notorious inquisitors inside the SVB movement – gave a more detailed list of Matorin's "sins." According to him, Matorin had been too busy organizing antireligious festivals rather than taking part in real antireligious work. Moreover, cursed Matorin had "emphasized the importance of studying various religions rather than fighting against them."⁶² As usual, there was no real logic in this hunt of the guilty ones during the Great Terror.

60 Khlevnyuk 1995, 158–159.

61 "В течение многих лет во главе руководства ленинградской организации стоял враг народа, мерзкий двурушник Маторин, бывший личный секретарь Зиновьева. Маторин не порывал связи со своим шефом вплоть до ареста, знал о подготовке террористического акта против т. Кирова, соучаствовал в этой подготовке и, достойный ученик Зиновьева по двурушничеству и лицемерию, выступал на траурных собраниях СВБ, посвященных Сергею Мироновичу, с проклятиями против убийц и с призывом к бдительности." AR 1936, No. 4, 2. "Приговор народа, вступительная статья." See also *Bezbozhnik* 1935, No. 2, 2. Передовая "Будем бдительны!"

62 Oleshchuk 1937, 21.

Matorin, the victim, could not have shown himself more "orthodox" than he did in his many articles, but the tide was against him.⁶³

At this stage, the terror had in fact spread from Leningrad to the provinces and the republics. Stalin had realized quite soon that the local party leaders were not ready to carry out extensive purges in their own territories. As an example of this reluctance to introduce a general reign of terror is the Plenum of February-March of the Central Committee 1937. The minor leaders of the party followed the Gensec. Once again they pledged themselves to the policy of "the general line" by accusing the danger of anti-Soviet elements, offenders, returning kulaks or millions of believers. According to the heated speeches, the kulaks and believers posed a direct threat to the Soviet regime. However, some of the delegates made a last resort to stop the machine of terror. One of these eminent delegates from the Ukraine, P.P. Postyshev (1887–1940), openly objected to the reign of terror. He had been earlier a staunch Stalinist and had fought against the opposition. These constrained protests, however modest, were enough to bring about a new overall purge in the Soviet provinces and oblasts. Especially Ukraine, the area of Postyshev, was treated with great brutality by Kaganovich, one of the Stalin's protégés. Other areas, such as Caucasus-area and Western Oblast, also suffered considerably.⁶⁴

As a result of this meeting, Soviet republics and oblast were purged; especially the Ukrainian Communist party and, logically enough, the local SVB movement became targets of the terror. Together with the Soviet Ukrainian intelligentsia, the higher ranks of the SVB leaders were subjected to terror. Philosophers and leading officials in the Ukrainian national SVB movement, such as P. J. Demchuk, V. A. Yurinetz, M. A. Nyrchuk and Ignatyuk, were reviled by invectives such as "Fascists, national and Trotskyite falsificators."⁶⁵ In some

63 For Matorin's article from 1931 in which he condemned both "right" and "left" mistakes in the antireligious activity, see VA 1931, No. 4. 20–21. "Изучение корней религиозности и задачи антирелигиозной работы." Matorin was actually Zinovev's secretary but was working as a secretary at a special commission dedicated to "bringing together countryside and urban areas in Leningrad." See LP, June 2 1925, No. 123. See also LP 1925, No. 230, 5. "На пороге зимней работы. Очередные задачи наших обществ смычки."

64 Conquest 1971, 266–269, 343–354. See also Khlevnyuk 1995, 160. See also VI 1993, No. 6, 5–6; Levytsky 1974, 296–300.

65 PZM 1936, No. 1, 75–76. "К итогам борьбы на философском фронте Украины."

cases, condemnation was posthumous and directed against those who had been "orthodox" in their time – for example M. A. Reisner (1868–1928), veteran Bolshevik and one of the architects of the 1918 "separation decree", was now considered to have been too soft in dealing with religion. According to the authors of the articles accusing him (E. Muravev and V. Shokhor), the only right method to wage war on religion was that employed in the fight against "counter-revolutionaries."⁶⁶

The local purges were extended to all the local Cult Commissions and SVB levels in the Soviet Union. The newspaper *Antireligioznik* worked as a mouthpiece of this terror and usually issued new arrests. Especially national leaders were under a heavy fire and leaders such as Ignatyuk were mentioned as having worked together with "terrorist and counter-revolutionaries." According to these invectives, Ignatyuk had been hiding behind revolutionary phrases and had presented himself as an "orthodox Marxist" criticized leftists. Actually, *Antireligioznik* declared, Ignatyuk had "carried terroristic bands on his spine." Together with Ignatyuk, the NKVD had discovered several other new enemies among the ranks of the SVB; among others, a certain Gokkel, a Soviet German communist and an editor of the Volga German-language antireligious newspaper "Neuland." Moreover, he was assisted by a certain "Trotskyite Stukov" who had also been active in his sabotage. The noose was now tightening around the central organs of the SVB when the security apparatus discovered that a certain Mashchenko, "a former Trotskyite", had worked inside the SVB central organization.⁶⁷

The accusations were spreading further and now it was the turn of

66 PZM 1935, No. 6, 116–117. "К вопросу о марксистском понимании религии."

67 AR 1936, No. 4, 2. "Приговор народа. Вступительная статья." Especially these emissaries sent by Stalin to the republics were anxious to find signs of "nationalism" among local party leaders. For example, Mansurov, a certain leader of the SVB movement in Tatarstan, was discovered as an "enemy of the people" because of his "nationalistic opinions." AR 1937 No. 7 "Журнал "Сутышчан Алласыз" (Обзор номеров журнала за 1936 и первое полугодие 1937 г.". 63. See also AR 1937 No. 8, 54–55. "Работа организаций СБВ" its evaluation on Mansurov and his ideological errors. Moreover, one year later, in 1937 the newspaper *Antireligioznik* announced that a certain Grigorev, who had been a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian SVB, proved to be a "hostile and anti-party" person. AR 1937 No. 8, 54–55. "Работа организаций СБВ."

SVB leaders in the Caucasus to suffer, when M.V. Kobetsky (1881-1937), one of the main inquisitor inside the SVB movement, charged the Central Council of the SVB organizations in Georgia and Azerbaidzhan, naming dangerous enemies of the people such as "Trotskyite" Gogiberidze, Andriadze and Hulufli.⁶⁸

The wave of arrests was now inevitably approaching Moscow, and it seemed only a question of time before Yaroslavsky, the principal leader of Soviet antireligious activity, would also perish too. Nevertheless, the reign of terror tightened its grip next on him – against his deputy inside the SVB movement, Lukachevsky. The official pretext of purging Lukachevsky was his alleged opinion regarding the "withering away a religion. In the newspaper *Antireligioznik* Kobetsky mentioned these ideological sins and cited certain "mistakes" in Lukachevsky's works. According to Kobetsky, "the Section of History of Religion and Atheism inside the Institute of Philosophy in Academy of Sciences" had been aiming critical darts against the works of Lukachevsky.⁶⁹

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The fate of Lukachevsky was discussed during the dramatic meeting that took place 1 December 1936. During this meeting, the leaders of the Soviet antireligious movement had a fundamental discussion concerning reported "defects" and "enemies of the people" inside the SVB movement. However, the main question was, as expected, who was to be blamed? Who was responsible for recruiting these cursed "enemies of the people" inside the SVB movement? Was Yaroslavsky guilty of defending these people? Was the Central Council of the League, SVB to be accused?⁷⁰

During this stormy meeting, Lukachevsky was able to defend himself and criticize himself for "mistakes" against the party. However, this was not enough for his accusers. According to the allegations Lukachevsky had made too many mistakes, such as cheating the party, defending Matorin and recruiting "open Trotskyites" for the SVB movement. Nevertheless, Yaroslavsky pacified the most bloodthirsty accusers of Lukachevsky by stressing

68 Kobetsky 1937, 40.

69 Kobetsky 1937, 41. See also AR 1937, No. 4, 62 "Сводка антирелигиозной литературы. Аннотация на статью: П. Федосеев - О "теории" стихийного отмирания религии. Статья в газ. "Комсомольская Правда." 68(3649) от 24 марта 1937 г.

70 RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op. 4, d. 57. ll. 1-44. "Стенограмма совещания у тов. Ярославского по СВБ. 1 декабря 1936 года."

that his fate was not concealed. According to Yaroslavsky, Lukachevsky had a right to "appeal" to higher instances and he also reminded his audience that many of them had cooperated with Matorin without complaining. He also defended himself by stating that he was not responsible for the mistakes of his deputy.⁷¹

Krasikov, however, was able to present some open criticism against Yaroslavsky and complained that the Cult Commission offered them very little cooperation; actually "comrade Yaroslavsky" had not shown himself in this commission. Yaroslavsky's response was revealing "I have no time for everything!" ("...я не могу успеть везде!"). However, Krasikov continued his push and stressed that the Cult Commission had no idea whatsoever of the plans of the SVB movement. He closed his speech by stressing that there was an urgent need for close cooperation with these two institutions. For example, the question of closed churches was more than burning; it was a matter of who should take care of them. At the same time, believers had not enough premises for their needs. According to Krasikov, the SVB movement should be able to help people in these kind of problems.⁷²

The outcome of this meeting was confusing; Putintsev and other leaders of the SVB were more than eager to stress that there were substantial problems in the whole activity of the SVB movement. According to Putintsev and others, the "crisis" of the SVB movement was due to "enemies of the people." Yaroslavsky maintained that Lukachevsky had not really been able to disturb the activity of the SVB, but these explanations did not satisfy Putintsev and other vigilantes of the SVB movement. This bitter debate was settled by the proposal of Yaroslavsky to organize two separate commissions to resolve these problems.⁷³

Interestingly enough, the "survival strategies" employed during the purges of the antireligious cadres literally destroyed the Soviet antireligious movement. The "policy of blaming all before they blame you" seemed to be one of the suitable insurances of Stalinist terror. This is also clearly seen in the history of the Soviet antireligious

71 RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op. 4, d. 57. ll. 6-8. "Стенограмма совещания у тов. Ярославского по СВЕ. 1 декабря 1936 года."

72 RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op. 4, d. 57. ll. 27-29. "Стенограмма совещания у тов. Ярославского по СВЕ. 1 декабря 1936 года."

73 RTsKhIDNI f. 89, op. 4, d. 57. ll. 17-20, 24, 43-44. "Стенограмма совещания у тов. Ярославского по СВЕ. 1 декабря 1936 года."

movement in the late 1930s. For example, in an aggressive article by a certain P. Fedoseev, Lukachevsky, Rozhitsyna, Voronitsyna and other enemies of the people were described as archenemies of communism and as representatives of the "anti-historism" in the Soviet antireligious movement. As many other articles of its kind, this hysterical paper called for resolute action against the "obvious counter-revolutionaries, most evil enemies of the people" including the already doomed Matorin and Nyrchuk. However, even being a notorious inquisitor was not enough; there was no safe survival strategy and being a notorious accuser did not always save one from being a victim of terror.⁷⁴

The irrationality of the purges becomes obvious when considering the fate of many "hounds" of the terror. As George F. Kennan has put it "...the jailors and judges of the one day were the prisoners and the victims of the next."⁷⁵ Interestingly enough, Lukachevsky's notorious accuser Kobetsky was himself soon denounced as an enemy of the people. Consequently, the mission of discrediting Lukachevsky and other "enemies of the people" was given to a new candidate – Oleshchuk, a secretary of the Cult Commission. Oleshchuk proved to be an even more ferocious inquisitor than anyone before him. As his zealous articles to the newspaper *Antireligioznik* demonstrated, Oleshchuk was a suitable person for this job and certainly worthy of his hire. His lengthy letters of accusation against all newly discovered enemies of the people emerged as harbingers of new terror inside the Soviet antireligious movement. Oleshchuk was especially active in crushing the SVB network in the national provinces and busied himself accusing many leading SVB representatives in the national areas. For example, he accused one eminent SVB leader in Ukraine, a certain Ignatyuk, as "a Fascist spy", who had always tried to sabotage the activities of the Godless-movement in Ukraine. According to these charges, the notorious Ignatyuk had, among other things, attempted to break "the united front of workers" in Ukraine, thus preparing the ground for Fascism. As to Georgia, Oleshchuk

74 PZM 1937, No. 3, 150–158. "Марксизм-Ленинизм о борьбе с религией." On the difference between the almost friendly way of conducting communist criticism in the early 1930s and later, see, VA 1931, No.2–3. 234–236. "Прения по докладу В. Ральцевича на тему "Задачи антирелигиозной пропаганды в связи с дискуссией на философском фронте."

75 Kennan 1961, 307. See also Conquest 1985, 28–35, 67–75, 86–92; Halfin & Hellbeck 1996, 462.

branded as "Trotskyites" such eminent SVB leaders as Gogiberidze and Andriadze, who had been, besides other failings, "engaged in commercial activities" and had stolen 40, 000 rubles from the SVB movement. However, according to Oleshchuk, the real Judas of the Soviet atheist movement was Lukachevsky. He had been able to infiltrate "alien" people into the ranks of the SBV organization. Moreover, he had expelled active members from the ranks of the SVB and filled the empty places with "adventurers, rascals, politically suspicious people, Trotskyite-Bukharinists bandits" such as Matorin, Pospelov, Gogiberidze, etc.⁷⁶

According to these allegations, Lukachevsky had prepared with the "filthy hands of Trotskyite bandits and provocateurs" useless antireligious booklets, and tried to introduce religious relics to the work of the antireligious cadres. Another clear sign of his guilt was the fact that Lukachevsky had often tried to be the leading theoretician inside the SVB movement. In short, as a clear indication of Lukachevsky's liberalism, he had often cited bourgeois authors such as H. Spencer (1820–1903) and E.B. Taylor (1832–1917). Only the lack of Bolshevik vigilance, as Oleshchuk emphasized in his article, could explain how such a man had been given an opportunity to work inside the SVB movement.⁷⁷

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76 Oleshchuk 1937, 21–23. See also Fedoseev 1937, 27–28. As another example of the irrationality of the purges we could mention the lists of sins of the condemned. Usually they consisted of accusations such as "espionage", "sabotage" or "wrecking." However, the men who had committed their life to antireligious activity were accused, surprisingly enough, of being agents of ecclesiastical bands. Moreover, during the trials against the former oppositionists, all possible sins including that of being secret believer, were cast upon them. For example, according to a certain article of Oleshchuk, the "Trotskyite-zinovievites" were actually allied with the clergy and servants of the cults. Moreover, as Oleshchuk charged, if Bukharin or Rykov had won during the power struggle there would have been changes in the relations between the Soviet state and religion, i.e. abolition of the "separation decree." PZM 1938 No. 1, 40. "К 20-летию декрета об отделении церкви от государства и школы от церкви."

77 Oleshchuk 1937, 23. This condemnation of Lukachevsky was repeated soon elsewhere in the Soviet antireligious literature. See AR 1937, No. 11, 63. "Критика и библиография. Антирелигиозная литература (сводка)." It is also riveting to see how Oleshchuk accused Lukachevsky of being too optimistic about the withering away of religion. However, at the same time Lukachevsky, according to Oleshchuk, was guilty of "administrative methods in that fight against religion" – which usually means that Soviet administrators had treated religion too brutally. Oleshchuk 1938, 16.

The second survival strategy during the Great Purges was called "praise the leaders." During the atmosphere of the late 1930s this strategy seemed to be more than natural. All written and published texts of that time bear the sign of this cult of personality. In order to save their skins all Soviet writers and authors were obliged to burst into "eulogies for the great leader – Stalin." This was visible also in Soviet antireligious writings of the late 1930s. For example, a typical sign of this dignified crawling before the Gensec was that nearly all antireligious articles considered Stalin to have a "crucial role" conducting the atheist activity inside the USSR. It was not a great surprise that according to the official SVB history, it was Stalin's initiatives that had rectified the failures of the "leftists." Moreover, it had been the wise guidance of Stalin again in the Autumn 1930 that had rectified the deeds of the "rightist opportunists."⁷⁸

However, despite surviving strategies, the whole sector of the Soviet antireligious activity was now at stake. The purges were escalating in 1937; the deputy of the SVB had emerged as an enemy of the people and many important local officials were locked up in NKVD cells or in unknown graveyards. At this stage, Oleshchuk apparently attempted to minimize the damage when writing his article on the history of the Central Council of the SVB movement during the last years. According to him, the security services had discovered Trotskyite spies inside the SVB, though the real "nest of wreckers" could be located elsewhere; according to Oleshchuk, it could be found in the Soviet trade unions and Narkompros.⁷⁹

However, the SVB movement had to yield to the reign of terror. The extensive purge had swept across republics and oblasts like "a black tornado."⁸⁰ This storm had also demolished the Central Council of the SVB and regional leadership in many areas. All significant districts such as Leningrad, Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia and Northern-oblast had suffered from arrests and, together with areas and cities such as Sverdlovsk, Ivanovsk, Kuibyshev, Stalingrad, Saratov, Crimea, Uzbekistan SSR, Mordvinian ASSR and Udmurtian ASSR, all activity of the SVB union had to be totally reorganized after these arrests. A similar situation prevailed in other parts of the Soviet

78 Amosov 1932, 299.

79 Oleshchuk 1938, 16.

80 Conquest 1971, 331.

Union.⁸¹ The summary of these purges was dealt during the IV plenum of the the Central Council of the SVB. In its resolution, the plenum stated that most of the mistakes had been corrected and that the enemies of the people – "Trotskyites, Bukharinists, bourgeois nationalists – bloody agents of Fascism" had been already rooted out. The resolution of this plenum mentioned only two enemies of the people by name: Lukachevsky and Kobetsky - the latter being one of the most notorious inquisitors during the purges.⁸²

However, despite many efforts, the whole existence of the SVB movement seemed to be at stake and the only way Yaroslavsky could defend himself and his organization was to emphasize the importance of this organization publicly. Consequently, in 1936, a great jubilee was organized for the SVB movement and Yaroslavsky used it as a possibility to advertise the results of the Soviet antireligious work and justify its activity. In doing so he did not miss a chance to claim the ideological "orthodoxy" and social usefulness of the SVB movement. Moreover, as a sign of his openness to self-criticism, Yaroslavsky was also ready to acknowledge the persistent strength of religion and even some weaknesses and mistakes made inside the SVB movement. Among the mistakes mentioned by him were such things as the weak education of antireligious cadres inside the SVB movement.⁸³

Nevertheless, when we examine the background of the leaders of the Soviet antireligious movement, it is fascinating to find some common features in their destinies. Firstly, the majority of the purged leaders were actually working more or less as genuine scholars in the Soviet social sciences. For instances, Matorin, Ignatyuk and

81 Oleshchuk 1937, 23. See also VA 1931, No. 8-9. 46. "Классовая база ислама в Крыму."

82 AR 1938, No. 3, 47. "Постановление IV расширенного пленума ЦС С В Б СССР от 4.2.1938 г." The "tit-for-tat" game, i.e., when accusers suddenly became the accused was part of Soviet social life in 1930s. The meritocratic Soviet system and the purges helped people to climb quickly the social ladders in Soviet society. Purges were the sudden advancement of political and civil careers. Andrie 1994, 206. As James von Geldern has stressed: "...The mythology of opportunity had a strong base in fact: aggressive working-class promotion was a state policy. Positions once filled by the educated and experienced were given to factory workers. Men and women of simple birth saw limitless horizons: Aleksei Stakhanov could break world coal-mining records; Pasha Angelina could break tractor-driving records and inspire women across the country." Geldern 1995, xix.

83 PZM 1936, No. 2-3. 78-79, 80-81, 83, 86. "Десять лет борьбы воинствующего атеизма." See also self-criticism, Bolshevik 1937, No. 5-6, 50-51. "О подготовке к выборам в советы депутатов трудящихся."

Lukachevsky had made a career in the folkloristics and anthropology. No doubt, the academic style and standards of these cadres came to the attention of many ordinary apparatchiks. These leaders were easy targets for accusations and ideological sins such as "plekhanovism" and "mechanism." The late 1930s were the era of so-called "little people" and this could be seen throughout in the Soviet antireligious activity. The machinery of terror and its main architect, Gensec himself, were eager to show that it was activists and the people with minor responsibility who had denounced the enemies of the people.

In the general witch-hunt atmosphere, the ordinary people hoping, i.e., to get better living quarters could castigate leaders. Consequently, the moral issues were not decisive anymore, i.e., the ordinary people could inform on their neighbours, friends, etc. only in order to obtain better apartment. As a matter of fact, the *auto-da-fé* of the NKVD could be ignited for the most trivial reasons. For example, I.N. Uzkov, the secretary of the Cult Commission in Moscow, sent a furious letter to the editors of *Rabochaya Moskva* in which he protested that he had not received a flat via the Cult Commission, although Oleshchuk had allocated flats for other people, who had no connection whatsoever to the CSCRQ. In his letter, he warned that the leaders of the SVB movement did not seem to have learned Lukachevsky's lesson; the enemy who had been guilty of "Trotskism, Zinovevianism, Fascism, and hooliganism of all sorts." As could be expected, the flat was soon found and the matter was finally settled by removing Uzkov to the Kalinin oblast, where he was "promoted" to do local CSCRQ work.⁸⁴

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Secondly, the condemned leaders had often very superficial links to the party or were not notorious either, as in Matorin's case (linked with Zinovev). Moreover, in the case of the Ukrainian Ignatyuk and Nyrchuk, officials were sometimes wiped out because they belonged to the convicted intelligentsia of some Soviet minority nation. When Stalin was purging minor nationalities in the 1930s these people had to go. To put it bluntly, these men were much too obvious targets when the Soviet reign of terror was searching for its victims. Nevertheless, the terror crippled the Soviet antireligious activity, as these victims had often constituted also the "civilized" echelon of the SVB movement and it was difficult to find new specialists of similar

84 GARF f. 5263, op.1, d. 43, rol. 2. See also Dunaevsky 1932, 451-452, 456. See also Bolshevik 1937, No. 5, 2-3. "Овладеть большевизмом, ликвидировать беспечность."

Пролетарии всех стран, соединяйтесь!

БЕЗБОЖНИК № 4

Апрель 1937
Год издания
XV

Рисунок напечатан в газете „Правда“ в 1930 г. в связи с так называемым „крестным походом“ папы римского.



„Бог „Правду“ видит... и она ему очень не нравится“ („Правда“ № 82, 1930 г.)

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"God reads "Pravda" and it does not please him." (Workers answer to the Pope). The caricature was first published in Pravda in 1930. This picture was originally a part of the propaganda campaign against the Pope. Source: Bezbozhnik 1935, No. 4.

calibre to take their place.⁸⁵

However, as previously mentioned, it was not only the leaders of the Soviet SVB movement who were suffering, but the entire country. After the military conflict with Japan in 1937, a campaign was set up in order to start a new hunt for clergy, who were now accused of spying for Japan. According to the Soviet press, all the clergy in the Soviet Union had been more or less collaborating with foreign security services. The Soviet ideologists now had a very difficult mission: to establish and explain charges against the Orthodox clergy, who were supposed to have been controlled and used by non-Christian Japan. One way of justifying this was to accuse Soviet Buddhists, the ROC and Catholics working jointly in Manchuria in order to undermine the local Soviet rule there. During the heated atmosphere of the late 1930s, this strange cooperation was considered as a serious threat although this plot did not make much demands on logic. Nevertheless, as a certain B. Kandidov put it in an article, "the Japanese intelligence utilizes services of all religious organizations, Orthodox, Catholics, Moslems, Buddhists, Old Believers, Sectarians."⁸⁶

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These delirious above accusations characterize the general atmosphere of Soviet society at the time. Actually, the Soviet religious organizations were caught between the Scylla of orgiastic terror and the Charybdis of semi-liberal gestures. Moreover, Gensec himself was recommending a new kind of national- minded Communism and the sponsoring of old Russian traditional values. During the mid-1930s, the government, in fact, had approved of a partial retreat to old traditional values. For example, Christmas trees, which had been banned in 1929 together with Santa Claus, were now allowed back under new names; for example, the Christmas tree was renamed the

85 See the activity of Matorin, Ignatyuk and other "enemies of people" in the antireligious journal "Militant Atheism" in the early 1930s. VA, No. 1, 180-181, 183. "Всесоюзное совещание антирелигиозных отделений научно-исследовательских учреждений СССР. Москва 14-15.12.1930 г." On the role of Matorin in the Soviet "real" social sciences, see VAN 1931, No.2, 2. "Организационно-административная хроника"; VAN 1931, No. 5, 52. "Организационно-административная хроника." VAN 1931, No.6, 54.

86 "...Японская разведка пользуется услугами любых религиозных организаций: православных, католических, магометанских, буддийских, старообрядческих, сектантских.." See also Bezbozhnik 1937, No. 7, 7. "Попы - шпионы"; Bezbozhnik 1937, No. 11, 6-7. "Шпионы и диверсанты в рясах"; Bezbozhnik 1938, No. 8-9. "Религия на службе японских самураев" КР, 1938, No. 50, 3. "Процесс антисоветского "право-троцкистского блока."

New Year Tree. In addition, on Easter 1934, Moscow shops had been permitted to sell ingredients for traditional paskha-cake, etc. However, the change of mind did come easy. In the late 1930s, the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, attacked believers who were "systematically utilizing Christmas to celebrate and thus to conduct counter-revolutionary propaganda and agitation."⁸⁷

As noted, during the delirious witchhunt of Soviet society in the 1930s, Soviet society observed its own peculiar laws. As the third great trial that of Bukharin's group implied, the prosecutors of this inquisition invented charges which bore some kind of perverted humour. The partisans of the opposition were to die as "traitors, as perpetrators of crimes beyond the reach of reason."⁸⁸ For example, when the prosecutor invented conspiracies; i.e., Bukharin was charged with advising a certain "English spy" (sic!) A.I. Ikramov (1898–1938). He was accused of having been organizing the clergy and inciting backward religious masses to oppose the Soviet rule. During this notorious trial of 1938, Ikramov himself testified against Bukharin and declared that Bukharin had ordered him to organize kulaks and utilize their religious fanaticism to undermine the Soviet system.⁸⁹

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It was not surprising therefore that the late 1930s proved to be fatal, not only for communists themselves but for all potential "enemies", i.e., for the clergy of every kind. The NKVD was eagerly fulfilling its abominable quotas of terror by every means and servants of the religious organizations formed a suitable target for mass repressions. The "need of terror" was part of a psychosis of the late 1930s in the Soviet society. Soviet society was welcoming the terror, and the praxis of worshipping the state terror was an *ordre du jour*. For example, as a sign of the vicious circle of both terror and fear, Oleshchuk praised "the NKVD, which had exposed quite a few ecclesiastics and sectarian leaders who had utilized religion to hide their destructive and spying activities."⁹⁰

87 КР, 1938, No. 2, 2. "Происхождение и сущность поповского рождества"; КР, 1938, No. 88, 1. "Терпеливо и настойчиво вести антирелигиозную пропаганду." See also Stites 1991, 306.

88 Deutscher 1967, 378.

89 Izvestiya 1938, March 8, No.55(6522). "Процесс антисоветского право-троцкистского блока"; Bezbozhnik 1938, No. 3, 3. "Если враг не сдается, его уничтожают"; Bezbozhnik 1938, No. 3, 4. "Сообщники троцкистско-бухаринской банды шпионов и убийц."

90 "...органы НКВД разоблачили немало церковников и сектантских

5. The Fall of the Cult Commission

The Great Purge had a devastating impact on the activity and the work of the Cult Commission both in Moscow and in the provinces. The network of the Cult Commission was more and more in a state of chaos and the central commission in Moscow could do nothing but wait. During its last years, this commission was little more than a lame duck; in 1937–1938, it convened only five times. In its last year, 1938, the Cult Commission did not convene at all. On March 29, 1938, Krasikov asked Kalinin to confirm the status of the Cult Commissions but he also acknowledged the possibility of dissolving this organ. Moreover, as a last attempt to extricate themselves from the accusations made by the SCE and other institutions, the Cult Commission had tried to find out how local organs were really using the premises of confiscated churches. As a means of enforcing its official inquiries, it had asked that the local officials send photographs and detailed descriptions of the new uses these premises were being put to.⁹¹

However, although the central Cult Commission seldom convened, the members of the commission were active in sending letters to local officials. See, for example, how Krasikov tried to stress that the closure of churches required political thinking and local officials should take into consideration local circumstances when they liquidated religious organizations. The most important thing was, as Krasikov put it, to evaluate the political necessities of closing churches in relation to local concrete circumstances.⁹² Some local officials did in fact comply with this request regarding confiscated churches, but the days of the Cult Commission were, in any event, numbered.⁹³

вожаков. использовавших религию как прикрытие для своей диверсионно-шпионской деятельности." *Bolshevik* 1938, No.16, 35. "Боевые вопросы антирелигиозной пропаганды."

91 GARF f.5263, op.1, d. 52, l. 1–68.

92 "...Сущность вопроса заключается в том, чтобы при закрытии церкви строго соблюдая законность руководствоваться политической целесообразностью данного мероприятия в связи с конкретной обстановкой местности..." See, GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 988. "Председателю Ленинградского Совета РК и КД на 011.17 от 1.11-37г.."

93 See the explanations of local officials. See GARF f. 5263, op. 1, d. 51, rol.1, "В Президиум ВЦИК. Докладная записка о выполнении Горсоветом и РИКом и постановлений Президиума ВЦИК о ликвидации и использовании молитвенных зданий под культурно-просветительные цели."

The formal reason for the liquidation of the CSCSRQ was simple: at that time, the TsIK was rationalizing its activities, and as a sign of the new era it closed many of its permanent commissions, including the Cult Commission. Consequently, on 16 April 1938, on orders from the Presidium of the Highest Soviet of the USSR, the nation-wide network of the CSCSRQ was dissolved.⁹⁴ The duties of this organ were transferred to the security organs. However, the fare for this organ was long in the balance. The constant arguing with local officials, the lack of authority, and the lack of resources had made it a suitable target for criticism. For example, negative publicity such as the report of the SCE and the general evaluations of the CSCSRQ in 1936, no doubt had the effect of frustrating the position of this organ. Moreover, there was a shadow of an ideological suspicion on the leading cadres of the Cult Commission, who seemed to be too soft and ineffective in relation to religious organizations.⁹⁵ However, the main reason for closing down this organ was simpler than just the suspicion or purges.

The most likely reason was the Stalinist concept of the new socialist society. According to the official Stalinist interpretation, the USSR was taking a giant step towards full socialism. According to this interpretation, the Soviet Union and socialism had been victorious. Once disenfranchised *lishentsy* had received their political rights and the whole Soviet system had moved to a new stage it was obvious that there was no need for special organs dedicated to dealing with religious organizations – in theory.

The magic word of this change was the new victorious society which already had consolidated its achievements. With its collectivized agriculture, new industry and the adoption of the new Constitution, it had already paved the way to the new society.

One of the signs of this transition to socialism was the reform of the Soviet administrative apparatus. Accordingly, when the Soviet governmental apparatus was reconstructed in the late 1930s, the system of Cult Commissions was abolished, together with other standing commissions as a relic of the old pre-communist society. Thus, the story of the Cult Commission ends with quiet funerals and administrative orders. Some of its members had been purged but others not. Krasikov, for instance, was buried in the Kremlin wall as an "Old

94 GARF f. 7523, op. 4, d. 3, l. 3, 14.

95 Martin 1995b, 147.

Bolshevik" in 1939. However, the story of the Cult Commission has hopefully shed some light on the religious policy of the 1930s and on the machinations of the Stalinist state as such. Especially, the archival evidence has, it is to be hoped, contradicted some of the well established stereotypes and studies based on less reliable sources. Indeed, we must always be ready to question our hypotheses and assumptions. This is particularly the case when we are dealing with such complicated challenges as Stalinism and the history of the 1930s. The ground rule suggested by Arch Getty really pays heed to this problem...

..the simplest explanation with the fewest assumptions and consistent with evidence is usually the best."⁹⁶

96 Getty 1993b, 62.

V Conclusions

The rise and fall of the Cult Commission coincides with one of the most turbulent periods in Russian history. During the collectivization period, the traditional and cultural roots of the Russian countryside were destroyed. Moreover, at the same time agricultural Russia was transformed into an industrial giant; the Russian people built pyramids of heavy industry - simultaneously, the great Pharaoh, Stalin, imposed purges and the Great Terror on Russian society. The price of this new industrial greatness was paid for the Russians themselves; those who suffered most were those who believed in the old traditional values, such as religion.

The story of the Cult Commission is inextricably linked with the general Soviet experience of the 1930s. On the one hand, the Cult Commission seemed to be just another *ad hoc* Soviet commission set up by the Communist party. On the other hand, unlike the numerous commissions inside to the Soviet state apparatus, the Cult Commission in Moscow was more stable by nature. The Commission of Cults was designed to resolve not only some acute political problems but also to deal with one of the main ideological enemies of the Soviet regime. Even so, a cursory glance at the rise and the fall the CSCRQ during the period 1929–1938 might give one the impression that this commission amounted to little more than a minor episode or a short interlude in the turbulent history of the Bolshevik party. The reality, however, proved to be quite different.

The history of the Cult Commission, with all its ups and downs, reflects the basic dilemmas of the Stalinist system in the Soviet Union. The basic function of this commission was to create a uniform method and to coordinate procedures in dealing with religious organizations. Moreover, unlike many other standing commissions set up by the Politburo or the VTsIK, this commission had a clear profile. The Commission of Cults had a distinct mission and it was profoundly anchored to the activity of the VTsIK.

As a matter of fact, by examining the history of this commission, we are able to get a clearer picture, not only of the Soviet religious policy, but of the problems relating to general decision-making in the

Soviet system during the 1930s. Moreover, the history of this commission contributes to an understanding of the dynamics of party-bureaucratic interaction during 1929–1938. Thus, the picture we get from the rise and fall of the Cult Commission also verifies the findings about the "weight" of the Russian past on Utopian social engineering, and what is more interesting, the story of the Cult Commission gives us some clues as to one of the most burning questions among specialists in Soviet history: why did the communist experiment fail and why did one of the mightiest military powers armed with nuclear weapons and resorting to totalitarian ways of governing, collapse.¹

It seems that the Stalinist society, despite its rigid ideological *credo* and unified policy-making, encountered great problems when dealing with local officials. The Commission of Cults, as was also the case with other Soviet state organs, had a problem in dealing with local officials; these people had their own stubborn network of power - Soviet "anarchy in the middle." This problem had been constituted an eternal problem as far as the history of Russia is concerned. Stalin faced the same dilemma as all of his predecessors in Russia; how to govern this vast country, how to implement the will of Moscow? The basic question was: how to keep tabs on the local satraps, how to implement the will of Moscow?²

At the beginning, the Cult Commission was one of the standing Soviet commissions set up to assist in the battles of the Cultural Revolution. Its practical function was to handle the economic exploitation of the religious organizations and especially to coordinate the confiscations of church-bells. As was the case with many other

1 It seems that there were only few scholars who could predict the collapse of the Soviet system. Moreover, these people, such as Andrei Amalrik or Helène Carrère D'Encausse, were not taken overly seriously. See Helène Carrère D'Encausse: *Decline of an Empire. The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt.* Translated by Martin Sokolinsky and Henry A. La Farge. Newsweek Books. New York. See also Brzezinski 1971, 78. 1978.

2 The problem with local networks of power and their stubborn resistance to Moscow is familiar from the history of Imperial Russia. The local aristocracy, landed gentry, the church, and other groups constituted the "national opposition" which was carrying on a fight against all reforms. It was ready to cooperate only if the monarchy gave it some material inducements or privileges. After the 1917 revolution, the old local nobility was de-throned and replaced by new echelons of Soviet rulers. Quite soon, this new local network reimposed the practices of the old system. See Pipes 1966, 7–8.

Soviet institutions in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, the Cult Commission had two ambiguous missions. Firstly, it was assigned the rather pompous role as the leading organ of the Soviet religious policy (at first in RSFSR). This grandiose mission given to the Cult Commission reflected something of the resolute atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution; it was, at any rate essential that religion and other ideological relics were supposed to be rooted out before the emergence of the new socialist society. However, these ambitious goals of the commission collided with reality; the Cult Commission was supposed to be the leading organ in this sphere but it was all too clear that it did not have the capacity to carry out its mandate. As usual, the demands of political reality and economics turned out to be more significant than the ideology.

According to archival material, the second and a real role of the Cult Commission during the early 1930s was to assist the Soviet industrialization – to collect the valuable bells from the Soviet churches. Only after confiscating the valuable items, bells, etc., the churches were allowed to close and the parishes were dissolved. Therefore, we could assert that the Cult Commission was rather an auxiliary organ to take care of economic strangling of the Soviet religious organizations.

Therefore, it is rather riveting to see how this commission was supposed to handle major problems and the drawing of strategic outlines of Soviet religious policy. As pointed out, the Commission of Cults turned out to be a cashier of the Soviet state, a institution for looting the last remaining valuable items from the churches. Here we may discern a clear contradiction. In actual fact, the commission was dealing with the technical execution of Soviet religious policy, and not with its formulation. This could be seen, of course, as a loss of authority, although the commission had officially obtained a prestigious mandate from the VTsIK. The real decisions were made elsewhere, not by the Cult Commission.

However, as time went by, the commission and its political importance increased. As the waves of the Cultural Revolution receded, this commission became a place for "private debates" among Soviet officials. As we may detect from the documentary material, the VTsIK and the Cult Commission were not ideal places for party ideologists or communist vigilantes. On the contrary, the weight of the history was loaded on the shoulders of the Cult Commission. As during the period of Imperial Russia, the central officials in Moscow were engaged in an endless battle against the local resistance. The Cult Commission became the place for the Soviet apparatchiki, which

had a natural interest in normal governmental procedures. Interestingly enough, the VTsIK had, among other things, the duty of preserving the goodwill of the Soviet citizens. This institution was a place where ordinary Soviet people could deliver their complaints and requests. Thus, whether it liked it or not, Cult Commission was part of the Soviet institution which had as its basic mission supervising the actions of the local satraps and "correcting" the excesses and brutality of these local officials.

Subsequently, when examining the relations between the commission and local organs, we may get a good glimpse into everyday Soviet administrative practices and the constant struggle between Moscow and Soviet peripheries. The officials working on the Cult Commission in Moscow realized from the very beginning that local Soviet officials exceeded the limits of the Soviet legislation. However, during the Cultural Revolution, this was considered more of a virtue than a vice. In fact, the overall emphasis of the Soviet regime in the early 1930s was to settle scores with class enemies once and for all.

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However, with Stalin's "Dizzy with Success" intervention, the overall frontal attack on religious organizations was temporarily halted. From now on, the commission started to emphasize "revolutionary legality" as one of its main principles. The reason for this new line was obvious: the Cult Commission favoured this expression as a weapon against the local officials in order to achieve a unified and coordinated religious policy in the Soviet Union. Although this organ could not conduct any real discussions, officials inside the Cult Commission were able to write memos and reports to higher institutions. Moreover, it also worked as a "court of appeal" when dealing with the closure of churches and putting an end to other "activities" of the local officials.

Afterwards, during the "good years" of the 1930s, the Cult Commission started to restrict the "illegal" activities of local leaders. As pointed out, it was Stalin's "Dizzy with success" article that inspired these calls for "revolutionary legality" and complaints against "excesses." As an example of the famous Bolshevik jargon, the term "revolutionary legality" could be interpreted in many different ways to different people. On the one hand, the hard-liners of the Soviet regime understood this term as an excuse for harsh methods against class enemies. On the other hand, "moderate" communists understood it as a way of observing "normal" legal practices.

However, when examining the general situation in the Soviet Union, we may say that Stalin's lip service to "revolutionary legality"



"The Boss and His Pipe". Source: The Bolshevik Poster. Yale University Press. 1988. New Haven and London.

did infect Soviet religious policy. The central organs now had some kind of weapon to use against the unauthorized actions of local officials. Especially the local Soviet security organs had been reluctant to comply with orders coming from the VTsIK or the CSCRQ. However, the burning question remained the same as earlier: how to execute the policy of the central organs and how to control the periphery, which was conducting its own policy. This constituted the principal concern of the Soviet regime in Moscow.

The basic problem was the fact that the Cult Commission had no means to enforce its resolutions or demands for more "revolutionary legality." When the Cult Commission turned to Soviet judicial officials, they received very little help. Consequently, the Cult Commission, in order to fight against the excesses of local officials and to reclaim its authority in the Soviet religious policy, needed basic information on the prevailing situation in the provinces. Besides, it needed more authority so that it could fight against the excesses of local officials and reclaim a leading role in pursuing Soviet religious policy. The Soviet judiciary apparatus was, in any case, in an

impossible situation. It could not fight against the demands of the security organs.

When summing up the roles of the Cult Commission we may realize that although the CSCSRQ had rather limited powers to decide upon the outlines of the Soviet religious policy, nevertheless, it played a substantial role, as mentioned, as a "court of appeal" between the demands of local militant atheists and local believers. Moreover, an examination of the piles of *delos* emanating from this organ seems to suggest that decisions to close or open the churches constituted the real battlefield of the Cult Commission. In this work, the people in that commission were compelled to vacillate between the demands of the militant atheists - those who were in favour of closing down all churches - and simultaneously complaints coming from local believers who appealed to the VTsIK. Furthermore, the reaction of the outside world proved to be significant in this sphere. Especially some members of the Cult Commission in Moscow (Krasikov, Smidovich) were obliged to act as "salesmen" for communism when foreign guests were trying to understand the state of affairs in religious policy in Soviet Russia. Moreover, when the Comintern declared the so-called "open-hand policy" it was more than consequential for the communist regime to keep up a façade of decency.

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As we sum up the rise and fall of the Cult Commission during its short period of existence, 1929–1938, we may draw a few significant conclusions. Firstly, central-peripheral relations in the religious political decision-making of the Stalinist state constitute a missing key for understanding the patterns of Soviet religious policy in the 1930s. This point of view has been somewhat neglected in earlier studies. It seems that in earlier books the crimes of the Bolshevik regime were seen either as manifestations of the satanic people or simply as necessary broken eggs on the frying pan of the proletarian revolution in Soviet Russia. Unfortunately, there have been only a very few studies that have sought to examine the facts in a dispassionate fashion.

According to archives, the religious policy of the Stalinist state was not a diabolical phenomenon *per se*. The people inside the Cult Commission were not executing an all-schemed-up-plan (devised by the SVB) to exterminate the church, at least not after the Cultural Revolution. In many respects, the Cult Commission in Moscow often acted, paradoxically enough, as a guardian of the religious organizations. Actually this consistory of atheists was engaged in a constant battle between local and central administrative organs. Its officials in this commission were not, *de facto*, contemplating satanic

plans of total destruction but rather wrestling with the eternal dilemma of how really to govern Russia. It was in their administrative interest to restrict the most obvious and brutal violations of Soviet laws. However, this interest did not emanate from any benign feelings of these central officials but rather from the desire of Moscow to control the Soviet periphery.

We may also find common features of how the central government tried to solve the problem of *samotek* with regard to religious organizations. At first, the Cult Commission approached Soviet justice officials and Soviet procurators, but to no avail. The Soviet procurators were unable to restrict local excesses. The reason for this was apparent; local officials often established their own social networks; party officials could always defend themselves when the Cult Commission made inquiries about how they were treating religious organizations. Moreover, the local Soviet satraps often funded their activities by "squeezing" believers or by often confiscating suitable religious premises for their own use.

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When considering the foregoing, one may also be tempted to speculate that the terror against these local party organizations would have been welcomed by the officials of the central Cult Commission. However, this solution "à la Arch Getty" is just too pat to be true. It must be remembered that the overall scale of the purges fell also on the central officials in Moscow. The vicious hammer of terror struck both at NKVD officers and at Orthodox bishops; the execution chambers were meant for both believers and godless people. "The enemies of people" such as priests and other *lishentsy* were killed during the "ezhovshchina" but not for their presumed ideological or counter-revolutionary sins but just "in case."

As noted, the methods of the Soviet religious policy understandably changed greatly during the 1920s and 1930s. During the NEP, the Soviet regime had often tried to find a "neutral" position in its relation with religious organizations. People responsible for this kind of policy could still be found in the Soviet administration. As a rule, these Soviet officials favoured steady and gradual development. The Cult Commission, however, was not populated with this type of officials; Krasikov, Smidovich and Tuchkov were party apparatchiki and had extensive experience in manipulating Soviet religious policy. However, when dealing with the reality of the 1930s, these people gradually became mouthpieces of Soviet state officials. In their memos and letters, they identified themselves with the goals of Soviet "democracy" and actually turned them into "administrators" who favoured a firm hand in dealing with local satraps. This represented

a great dilemma for the commission, which functioned in the middle of a conformist Stalinist society. To sum up, the Cult Commission turned from being an *ad hoc*, technical commission into a stable mouthpiece of Soviet bureaucrats maintaining firm control over local Soviet officials. Thus, as mentioned earlier, the commission was "a guardian angel" of the religious organizations rather than a leader of an organized attack on religion.

Consequently, the ultimate reason why the Cult Commission could not succeed in its basic mission to supervise and coordinate Soviet religious policy was actually the same reason that has so often blocked all reforms in Russia. For example, when there was no material gain to entice local organizations to obey (as there was during the confiscating of the church bells in the early 1930s) or terror to be feared, the authority of the central Cult Commission declined rapidly. It seems that the fall of this commission can be traced from the time when the "commission of loot" could no longer offer anything more to be looted.

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When summing up the earlier academic discussion, this work has sought to present a more detailed picture of Soviet religious policy in the 1930s. However, Soviet archives suggest us a more complicated picture than earlier "Cold War" studies which portrayed Soviet power as a monolithic monster. According to archival findings, the Soviet officials in the Cult Commission did not function according to some perverted plan in order to destroy religion. New information from Soviet archives allow us to get a general picture of Soviet religious policy and to comprehend the inner dilemmas of Soviet administration. Since the Cold War is over, we may also leave moral judgments and questions of moral responsibility for specialists in these particular fields to resolve.

As a matter of fact, instead of sniping from trenches of the past, we have a unique opportunity to gain an insight into one important religious political organ of the Soviet state. Consequently, it is hoped that the results of this study will contribute something new to the old debate between the "totalitarian" and "revisionist" schools, which for the "outsider" seems like a fight between generations of scholars. Firstly, in the light of the documents utilized in this study, there is no particular "school", which could explain these complicated problems of Stalinism. In one sense, the revisionist approach with its understanding of the need for a social approach to the history of Stalinist Russia is more appropriate. But, the author of this monograph wishes to share some of the opinions of the old totalitarian school. Consequently, instead of fighting as a zealot for this or that

methodology, the author of the present study wishes to find a kind of *mediating solution*, keeping in mind both the recently revealed documentation and the questions of social history alongside the peculiarities of Soviet institutional life. Secondly, this monograph has hopefully shed some light on the enormous problems involved in governing such a large country as Russia. The centre-periphery relationship; the question of how to rule Russia effectively is the key concept when dealing with these kind of problems.

Thirdly, it seems that there is hardly a place in the universe where Marxist formulas and doctrines could be adjusted to reality without encountering problems. Actually, it happened once, in *Aelita*, Aleksei Tolstois science fiction novel. According to this work, the class struggles of Mars occur strictly according to Marxist principles. No problems derived from a bureaucratic stiffness or because of tension in central-peripheral relation on this strange planet. However, in this day and age, these problems continue to confound us here on Earth.³

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Epilogue

Conducting an academic discussion on church-state relationships has some practical value when we are dealing with the contemporary situation in Russia. There are fields where the results of research and the contemporary political situation are linked together; one might even state that history dictates contemporary politics and academic speculations correlate with today's issues. In this respect, Alexander Yanov has encouraged researchers to abandon overly academic speculation in Soviet studies. In his view, Sovietology should assist Russia in finding its path to modernity and time should not be wasted with trivial academic questions. In the 1980s, he stated enthusiastically...

3 A note from the Russian Review editor is pertinent. The note declares that to study Stalinism is to study unsuccessful attempts to change the Russian people. Even Stalin failed to create a new Russian man.

"...Systems come and go, but governmental fiat cannot remake the human material of as large a social conglomeration as the peasantry. Neither the Mongols, nor Peter the Great nor Reformer Alexander II – nor did Stalin." "Is a Social History of Stalinist Russia Possible?" Russian Review, vi. Vol. 52. no. 3. July 1993.

..if ever there were a time for Sovietology to guide the process of Russia's traditionally dangerous transition to political modernity, it is now. Abstract academic discussions on the fate of Soviet Russia are out of date at the end of the 1980s."⁴

Nevertheless, it seems that theoretical academic discussion still has some relevance. Studies concentrating on the history of Soviet religious policy are still not up-to-date. After the Soviet Union collapsed, we are now able to shed light on the fate of the Soviet system and the way it treated its "tricky" ideological enemy, i.e., religion, thanks the availability of new archival documents.

The new role of religion and especially the ROC, became more stable during the last days of Soviet power. Especially the intelligentsia and new democratic leaders were anxious to underline the importance of the national church for the Russians. For example, in September 1990, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote his famous article "How to Rebuild (obustroit) Russia." This article received a positive response, including one written by B.N. Yeltsin. The general consensus of the various responses was that the Orthodox tradition could assist in some way in national rebuilding process. The ROC took a central role at that time. In a situation where the state had lost its ideological justification, the role of the church and all national traditions seems to be of utmost importance.

However, it is difficult to make predictions about the future of the ROC. On the one hand, nearly all the political parties recognize the significance of religion and a general goodwill prevails among Russians towards the ROC. On the other hand, there are many pitfalls, too. To mention but a few of these dangers, along with a desperate economic situation, the ROC suffers from a lack of competent clergy. Moreover, the church has been politicized lately, some members of its clergy being involved in the activities of anti-Semitic, national-fascist movements of the far-right. These political factions try to use the ROC as their demagogical forum for disseminating radical propaganda.

Moreover, the skeletons of the past are also troubling the leadership of the ROC. Neither the leadership of the Holy Synod nor Patriarch Aleksii II himself has been able to give any satisfactory explanation

4 Yanov 1989, 651.

concerning their activities during the Soviet era. Accusations of "collaboration" and "betrayal" have been levelled at the present leadership of the ROC by the Russian media and liberal clergymen such as Gleb Yakunin. Obviously, this discussion concerning the role of the eminent clergymen during the Soviet era has not spent its course. The present leadership of the ROC has been more than reluctant to discuss their own activity as former KGB "agents". Nevertheless, despite all the wild allegations and denials, the fact remains that the Soviet state interfered in the affairs of nearly all the religious organizations in the USSR. Especially now, that the new Russian state has lost its earlier ideology – Marxism-Leninism – the role of the church and all national traditions are more crucial. The leading politicians and especially Yeltsin's presidential staff have been more than eager to utilize the ROC and the well-known figure of Aleksii II. His legendary white *klobuk*, representing national decorum, has been seen near Yeltsin nearly everywhere.⁵

To sum up, the creation of a new Russia and a "reformed" ROC are still in progress; the same problems that worried Russian Czars and the Bolsheviks are confronting the new rulers of Russia. The question now is: how to construct something new while taking into account what has happened in history. Although predicting the future goes far beyond the powers of the author, one can not escape seeing the breathtaking prospects of the contemporary situation in Russia. The great question is whether the ROC will subordinate itself to the ruling regime, discrediting (again) itself in the eyes of the new Russian intelligentsia and populace, or will it try to establish a more independent position, thus becoming a real alternative for the Russians. *Богъ знает...*

5 See Yury Buydas article "For Church, No Hope" in *St. Petersburg Times*, 4 October 1996. See also Luukkanen 1996b, 49–53.

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Fond 3316 USSR TsIK
Fond 5263 The Commission of Cults (VTsIK), 1929-1938
Fond 5407 The League of Militant Godless in the USSR, 1922-1938
Fond 5446e A.I. Rykov
Fond 6982 The VTsIK Commission for the Draft Constitution of the RSFSR, 1936-1937

Central State Archive in Sankt-Petersburg (TsGA SPb) Центральный Го-

сударственный Архив Санкт-Петербурга.

Fond 1000 The Executive Committee of the Congress of the Soviets Representing Workers, Peasantry and Red Army in the Leningrad Guberniya
Fond 1001 Section of Governing the Leningrad Guberniya the Executive Committee
Fond 7383 Lenoblispolkom (The Leningrad Oblast Executive Commission of Soviets)
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