

Religijski - filozofski raksti XXXI

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Solveiga Krūmiņa-Konkova

## **‘SOVIET SPIRITUALITY’: THE PHENOMENON AND ITS RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES**

‘Soviet spirituality’ is one of the problematic concepts for which it is difficult to find an unambiguous definition. Authors of the articles published in this issue of the *Reliģiski-filozofiski raksti* (Religious-Philosophical Articles) attempt to understand this concept with the help of a seemingly better-explored concept – atheism. Soviet spirituality grew out of Soviet atheism, and they crossbred each other in their mutual relations. However, as our readers will see, just as there are different understandings of Soviet spirituality, there are also different understandings of atheism because both concepts have significant historical, regional, and cultural differences.

After spending decades trying to overcome religion, Soviet atheists found a new answer to the question of why religion is a problem for the communist project. Discarding the political and ideological interpretation of religion, they began to approach it primarily as a problem of spiritual life. “The ideological establishment no longer saw religion as a problem primarily because it was a political enemy or even alien ideology. Instead, religion was now understood above all as a spiritual problem. The ideological establishment began to focus on the spiritual development of Soviet society and saw the production of the ‘socialist way of life’ (*sotsialisticheskii obraz zhizni*) as the final battleground for the Soviet soul – because it assumed that the political and ideological battles had already been won” (Smolkina 2018, 163-164).

We can look at the ‘Soviet spirituality’ as forming a new ‘Soviet model’ of spiritual life after 1964 when the Soviet regime began to set its values, rules of behaviour and new rites, which had to characterise all the life cycles of the Soviet man – from birth to death. This model, of course, was not developed in an empty space but used all the results of previous atheist work. The goal of the creators of Soviet spirituality was “the development of a system of ideological socialization that inculcated Soviet values through a system of atheist, ethical, aesthetic, international, and patriotic upbringing. Even as this system became more expansive and complex, however, there was little to indicate that it produced atheist or Communist conviction” (Smolkina 2018, 163).

As the memories of those who experienced this Soviet spirituality reveal, they could formally follow Soviet ideological norms and rituals, even accept them as ‘normal’ and expertly perform the language of Soviet spirituality in public, but this did not mean that the Soviet standard of living deeply affected their life experience, often determined by a completely different spirituality. In all its often brutal struggles, atheism had failed to destroy either religion or its values and worldview. Thus, the implementers of the new dogmas and rituals had to replace the previous religious traditions. However, these traditions turned out to be stronger than atheist efforts to free up space for the new Soviet spiritual life. Even the memories of the lost spirituality helped to withstand the pressures of Sovietization. Moreover, the previous religious and spiritual experience actively transformed the new Soviet way of life. For example, the influence of Western religious and cultural traditions of the pre-war independent Republic of Latvia was so significant in Soviet Latvia that we can redefine the ‘Soviet spirituality’ as ‘Sovietised Western spirituality’.

Therefore, behind the showcase of invented Soviet spirituality was another spirituality rooted and tested in centuries-old religious traditions and spontaneous and passionate in the new spiritual quest. The sheltered life on the other side of the showcase allowed this quest to be surprisingly free at times. Does this parallel life belong to Soviet spirituality? To what

extent has it affected Soviet spirituality, and has the atheist model of Soviet spiritual life affected it?

The authors of the articles published in this collection have sought answers to these and other questions. They represent various branches of humanities and social sciences and have used various research methods to help understand both the research potential of the phenomenon of Soviet spirituality and its versatility and multi-layered nature.

### References

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**Marianna Shakhnovich**

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## **‘SCIENTIFIC ATHEISM’ AS AN IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT AND EDUCATIONAL PROJECT (1950s-1980s)**

*The main goal of this article is to identify the socio-historical context of the emergence of the ideologically loaded concept of ‘scientific atheism’, constructed in the USSR in the 1950s-1980s during the period of the announced transition from socialism to the construction of communism. The article uses the method of the historical sociology of concepts, which makes it possible to identify the connection between semantic contexts and institutional practices and to show how the conceptual category around which the corresponding discourse was formed became an instrument that produces socially significant meanings used in the practice of ideological production. The classics of Marxism did not consider atheism as a separate doctrine from materialism; despite this in the late 1970s, scientific atheism in the Soviet academic space turned into a separate science with its own subject of research. At the same time, scientific atheism was opposed to all other forms of atheism as the most consistent and the only true one.*

*Keywords: history of atheism, antireligious propaganda, scientific atheism, Soviet philosophy, communist ideology*

In the past three decades, a significant number of works has been published on the history of the confessional policy of the Soviet state, as well as the works on the history of anti-religious activities of Soviet public organizations, primarily the Komsomol and especially the Union of Militant Atheists (van den Bercken 1988; Luukkanen 1994; Peris 1998; Husband 2000; Pokrovskaya 2007). These publications contain numerous

archival materials reflecting the history of anti-church campaigns and anti-religious agitation in the USSR; however, the issue of the theory and practice of scientific atheism was not considered in them. In the works on the history of Soviet atheism, attention is paid to the peculiarities of scientific atheism. Thus, James Thrower considered the 'scientific atheism' as an "aspect of the Marxist-Leninist world-view which deals explicitly with religion and atheism" (Thrower 1983, XVI). Kimmo Kääriäinen agreed with him, and pointed out in his dissertation that scientific atheism has become less a criticism of religion, more a Marxist study of religion and a world-view discipline (Kääriäinen 1989). In contrast to them, Konstantin Antonov viewed 'scientific atheism' as a specific feature of the science of religion in the USSR, emphasizing its ideological bias and academic limitations. In some works that treat the official Soviet attitude towards religion and the church as a form of "radial secularization" (Kelly 2016), scientific atheism is interpreted as "an extreme version of secularization" (Stepanova 2014). In this vein, Elena Stepanova interprets the transformation of Soviet atheism from militant to scientific, considering the transition from the philosophical critique of religion to practical politics aimed at expunging not only religious institutions but also the daily expressions of religious beliefs (Stepanova 2020). Victoria Smolkin, following Dmitry Pospelovsky (Pospelovsky 1988), describes the history of Soviet atheism in the context of the confessional policy of the Soviet state. Exploring the official treatment of atheism and religion throughout Soviet history, she views scientific atheism as a form of scientism that replaced the militant atheism of the early Soviet period (Smolkin 2018). Based on this, she pays special attention to the activities of the *Znanie* Society, the editorial policy of the journal *Nauka i Religii* and some aspects of the activities of the Institute of Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the CPSU. However, in all these works, the question of constructing the meanings of the concept of "scientific atheism" and its origin was not studied.

The words "atheism" and "atheist" were introduced into the European philosophical discourse in France in the middle of the 16th century. It is

believed that for the first time François Rabelais, in a letter to Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1532, brought up the Greek word ἄθεος and immediately translated it into French – “athée” – to assess the behavior of one of his critics. At the same time, the word “atheist” at that period, according to Lucien Febvre, had a very negative connotation: it was used as the most negative characteristic of a person, in a series of words such as “thief”, “liar”, “poisoner”, “parricide” (Febvre 1947, 157). The word “atheist” entered the English language in 1587 from French, when A. Golding and Ph. Sydney translated from French into English and published in London the book *Treatise on the truth of the Christian religion against atheists, epicureans, pagans, Jews, Mohammedans and other infidels* (“Traité de la vérité de la religion chrétienne contre les athées, épicuriens, payens, juifs, mahométans et autres infidèles”), first published in Antwerp six years earlier (1581). The author of the treatise was the Huguenot Philip De Mornay, who fled to England from persecution and after the death of the Prince of Condé became so popular among the Protestants that he was called the “Pope of the Huguenots”.

In modern literature on the history of philosophy and free-thinking, the concepts of “atheism”, “atheistic” are applied to a variety of views, concepts and teachings. Thanks to this, the concept of “atheism” is deprived of certain content. For example, in the *New Philosophical Encyclopedia* Victor Garadzha, defining atheism as ‘denial of God (gods)’, pointed out that “the concept of ‘atheism’ can only be defined specifically historically”, but includes religious free-thinking and religious agnosticism in the essence of the concept” (Garadzha 2004, 194). Some authors perceive atheism only as “a denial of metaphysical ideas about God or spiritual essences” (Edwards 2005, 359), and in a broad sense this concept is interpreted as a denial of the supernatural and recognition of the absolute self-sufficiency of nature (James 1986, 479-480; Tazhurizina 2017, 14). In a large work devoted to atheism as a phenomenon of history and culture (Martin 2007), the theoretical problems of the contemporary understanding of atheism in scientific, philosophical, social and political aspects are discussed in detail, the connection to the history of atheism as related to

the history of natural science and the history of philosophy, with the struggle for tolerance and secular morality. The authors contrasted positive (strong / hard) atheism with negative (weak / soft) atheism, however, the concept of 'scientific atheism' is not considered at all.

In the history of ideological criticism of religion in the USSR, that is, in the history of Soviet atheism, five periods can be distinguished, which differ in the goals and methods of conducting ideological work. The first period from 1917 to 1921 was the period of anti-religious, most often anti-church agitation. The second period began with the publication of Lenin's article *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*, which noted the significance of "militant atheism" (Lenin 1964, 25) as well and pointed out the need for tireless atheistic propaganda and fight against religion.

In the 1920s-1930s, in the propaganda practice and in the philosophical and historical literature and journalism, various expressions were used that define the essence of atheism and the features of its forms. So, Ivan Voronitsyn in his *History of Atheism* (1928) used the following definitions: 'open atheism', 'complete atheism', 'theoretical atheism' and 'materialistic atheism'. He wrote about the 'respectful atheism' of Pierre Bayle, opposing Diderot's 'dogmatic', 'imperative', 'offensive and scandalous atheism', called Hume's views 'skeptical atheism' and, following Friedrich Mauthner, called Shaftesbury's deism 'religious atheism'. Alexander Lukachevskij in his *Essays on the History of Atheism*, published in the journal *Antireligioznik* (1929-1930) and in the book *Marxism-Leninism as Militant Atheism* (1933) used the definition of 'militant' when applied to atheism. This definition, first used by Lenin in 1922 as a characteristic of the active propaganda of a materialist worldview, corresponded to the tasks of offensive anti-religious propaganda and was widely used in the political discourse of the cultural revolution carried out in the country. Lukachevskij's book was a revised chapter from a textbook on dialectical and historical materialism prepared at the Communist Academy (Mitin and Razumovskij, 1932). Lukachevskij pointed out that "dialectical materialism is the only scientific, consistently atheistic worldview" (Lukachevskij 1933, 15). Concluding a brief summary on the history of atheistic doctrines, he

underlined: “Only dialectically materialism, Marxist-Leninist philosophy, based on all the achievements of scientific knowledge, provides a logically complete system of atheism, leaving no loophole for clergy” (Lukachevskij 1933, 20-21). However, the concept of ‘scientific atheism’ in the 1930s did not yet appear.

At the end of the 1930s, the ideological officials proclaimed the task of increasing the education in natural science. Igor Kurlyandskij published a memo, discovered in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, addressed to the secretaries of the Central Committee Stalin, Andreev and Yezhov, written in 1936 by Alexei Angarov, Deputy Head of the Department for Cultural and Educational Work of the Central Committee of the Party. He criticized the activities of the leadership of the Union of Militant Atheists, for the fact that it did not catch and failed to use the “turn of the broad masses” to scientific knowledge and mastery of science. Angarov wrote in his memo: “The Union was unable to move from the old ... methods of anti-religious agitation and propaganda (Komsomol Easter, Komsomol Christmas, disputes, etc.) to systematic and in-depth educational work based on the widespread popularization of knowledge and assistance to the party in the implementation of the scientific materialist worldview in the consciousness of the masses of the population” (Kurlyandskij 2011, 492-493). Thus, even before the beginning of World War II, there was a transition to a new stage in anti-religious activity – natural science propaganda. From 1944 to 1954, the third period in the history of Soviet atheism lasted, when criticism of religion turns out to be linked, first of all, with the propaganda of a scientific worldview. It was during this period when the concept of ‘scientific atheism’ appeared in the official discourse.

In 1945, a book by the head of the Propaganda and Agitation Directorate of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Georgy Alexandrov, *The History of Western European Philosophy*, was published. It was a course of lectures given by the author at the Higher Party School of the Central Committee. At the beginning of 1946, the same text was issued by the Publishing House of the Academy

of Sciences in the form of a textbook for universities and humanitarian faculties, and then, due to its demand, was republished in April of the same year again. Six months later, in November 1946, Aleksandrov was awarded the Stalin Prize for this textbook and was elected a full member of the Academy of Sciences. In his textbook, Aleksandrov, criticizing the limitations of enlightening “bourgeois” atheism, introduced the expression “scientific atheism” to denote Marxist atheism as the highest form of atheism. Pointing out that the founders of Marxism-Leninism highly appreciated the atheism of the French materialists, their militant, talented and vividly written atheistic literature, Aleksandrov noted that

“the atheism of the French materialists suffered from a serious defect. The French materialists did not understand the social reasons for the existence of religion. The origin of religion was explained by them idealistically. They brought religion out of the ignorance of the masses. One of the French enlighteners wrote that religion arose there and then, where ‘the first cunning man met the first fool’. Only dialectical materialism created *scientific atheism*” (italics by the author – *M.Sh.*; Aleksandrov 1946, 345).

In December 1946, Stalin discovered “major shortcomings and mistakes” in the coverage of the history of philosophy in this textbook, and at his direction in 1947 two public discussions took place, during which the textbook and its author were exposed to severe criticism (Batygin, Devyatko 1993). The critical speech of the Secretary of the Central Committee, Andrei Zhdanov, at the second discussion on June 24, 1947, was reprinted many times as a separate brochure. As a result, Aleksandrov was removed from his post as the head of the Propaganda and Agitation Directorate of the Party Central Committee and Mikhail Suslov was appointed in his place. Without doubt, all these circumstances could not fail to attract close interest to the textbook, which was read with increased attention, therefore, the new terminology could not fail to be noticed.

In 1954, a new period began in the history of atheism in the USSR – the period of scientific atheist propaganda, which lasted until 1961.

During this period, the concept of 'scientific atheism' received a new content; it was included in social theory and ideological and political practice and became an important factor in educational and cultural policy, an element of the Soviet way of life, and was even used as a rhetorical argument in the ideological confrontation with the West within the framework of the Cold War.

The beginning of its widespread use was laid by the Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU "On major shortcomings in scientific atheist propaganda and measures for its improvement" of July 7, 1954. That Resolution was prepared by the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Party, which was headed at that time by a close associate of Suslov and a good friend of Aleksandrov Vladimir Kruzhkov. He was Doctor of Philosophy and the author of the books on the philosophical views of Belinsky, Pisarev, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov. In 1953 he became the Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences in the Department of Economic, Philosophical and Legal Sciences. In 1949–1950 Kruzhkov was deputy to Mikhail Suslov, who then headed the Propaganda Department, created in 1948 from the Central Committee's Propaganda and Agitation Directorate. The Resolution stated that during the period of the extensive construction of communism, the party took measures to strengthen the propaganda of atheism. The Central Committee of the CPSU recalled Lenin's words that religion can never be a private matter in relation to the party, and the party cannot and should not be indifferent to "unconsciousness, darkness, obscurantism in the form of religious beliefs", and the propaganda of atheism should be one of the main directions of party's work". It was pointed out that a mistaken opinion was established in some party members and some ordinary people, that with the elimination of the 'class basis' of the church and the 'suppression of its counterrevolutionary activities' in the country there was no need for active atheistic propaganda, and that in the course of communism construction, the religious ideology would spontaneously outlive itself. A few months after the adoption of that Resolution, such a work in the field of atheist propaganda was

'deployed' that on November 10, 1954, the Central Committee of the CPSU was forced to publish a new resolution – *On Mistakes in Conducting Scientific Atheist Propaganda Among the Population*.

An interesting document was found in the Scientific Historical Archive of the State Museum of the History of Religion – *A Brief Memo on Errors in Scientific Atheist Propaganda*, compiled on October 10, 1954 for the 'decision makers' by the Deputy Director of the Museum Mikhail Shakhnovich at the request of the Director of the Museum Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich. It is quite possible that the arguments set out in that memo contributed to the fact that on November 10, 1954, the July Resolution was canceled. The memo was written on ten pages, we shall cite only a small excerpt, which testifies to the quantity and quality of lectures during new propaganda campaign:

“In August-October of this year, scientific atheist propaganda was launched in the country. So, for example, previously in Leningrad there were usually 30 anti-religious lectures a month, and now 500-600... Previously one could get ten newspaper clippings of articles on scientific atheist topics per a month, and now there are more than a hundred. Such a scale of scientific atheist propaganda in conditions, when there are no seriously trained personnel for its conduct, is accompanied by mistakes inevitably” (NIA GMIR Fund 1. Op. 2. D. 93. L. 17).

The author of the memo gave some examples, that testify to the complete absence of trained professionals in the field of not only atheism, but also in the history of religion: “New lecturers read their lectures on the basis of several brochures, they do not know the issues of religion and atheism, and therefore their lectures are full of absurdities. So, for example, one lecturer claimed that the Bible was written in Sanskrit and contains Hindu legends; another assured that the Communist Party treated religion differently from the church; the third reported that Marxism was taught in theological seminaries, etc. One can collect a huge bouquet of such nonsense. Verification and control of lecture texts does not save the



day. The lecturer can read a lecture from the text without serious mistakes, but can answer questions in such a way as to discredit everything. ... The lecturers devote the main content of the lecture to the exposure of the activities of the clergy, and not to the issues of the fundamental problems of science and religion. ... Lectures are required to expand the knowledge of the audience, and the lecturer says everything he knows about religion, but he knows very little and cannot support the audience with the adequate information on a particular issue. If the lecturer cannot provide serious information due to his lack of profound knowledge in the field in which he undertakes to lecture, then it is better not to read it. Lectures on medicine are delivered by doctors, and lectures on the origins of Christianity are often given by persons without any historical education..." (NIA GMIR Fund 1. Op. 2. D. 93. L. 23-24).

In 1959–early 1960, several resolutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU were adopted at once, which significantly influenced the state of scientific research in the field of implementation of scientific atheist propaganda. These resolutions had an ambivalent meaning: on the one hand, they aimed the party organs at increasing pressure on religious organizations and contributed to the emergence of propaganda literature, but at the same time they made it possible for scholars of religion to publish their works, which was extremely difficult in previous years. The resolutions were as follows: *On the State and Measures for Improving the Mass Political Work Among the Working People of the Stalin Region* of March 11, 1959; *On the Journal 'Nauka I Religii'* of May 5, 1959; *On the Journal 'Voprosy filosofii'* dated July 31, 1959; *On Measures to Improve the Work of the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge* of August 27, 1959; *On the Tasks of Party Propaganda in Modern Circumstances* of January 9, 1960; *On the Popular Textbook 'Voprosy Atheizma'* dated February 15, 1960. Those resolutions contributed to the emergence of a large program for the study of the history of religion and atheism, adopted by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences, thanks to which many works on the history and anthropology of religion and religious art were published. At the same time, the control of the party bodies over the

institutions in which, one way or another, the study of religion was carried out, increased. That affected, first of all, the museums and Institutes of the Academy of Sciences.

During this period, the teaching of courses on Marxist atheism as a separate discipline was gradually introduced in the country's higher educational institutions, along with the teaching of dialectical and historical materialism. It should be noted that in some educational institutions, courses in one way or another related to the history of atheism were taught earlier. So, in 1946-1948 at the Leningrad University's Faculty of Philosophy at the invitation of the Dean Mikhail Serebryakov Mikhail Shakhnovich taught the course in 130 academic hours titled *History of Religion and Atheism* (TsGA SPb Fund 7240. Op. 14. D.1099. L.69). That course was renewed by him in September 1953 under the title *General History of Religion and Atheism* (Shakhnovich 1957) and it remained under the same name until the mid-1960s. In 1959, departments of the history and theory of atheism were opened at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Mikhail Lomonosov Moscow State University and the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Taras Shevchenko Kiev State University. On February 10, 1960, in Moscow, at the Institute for Advanced Studies of Social Sciences at Moscow University, a Seminar for Lecturers of the Course *Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism* was held for the first time. Ilya Pantskhava, Head of the Department of History and Theory of Atheism of Moscow State University delivered a defining lecture "Marxist Atheism – the Highest Form of Atheism" (Pantskhava 1960). For ten days, the participants of the seminar listened to introductory lectures on all topics of the course *Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism*, which were developed by the Department of Moscow State University and were offered to all participants as the exemplary ones. All the materials of the seminar were published in the form of separate brochures, and later became the basis for the textbook (Pantskhava 1962). Beginning in 1961, textbooks for the course *Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism* for higher education began to be published in the Soviet Union (Tsameryan et al. 1961, Tancher 1961, Karlyuk 1961).

In 1961 a new period that lasted until 1988 started in educational history in the field of religion in the USSR – a scientific atheist upbringing. The third Program of the CPSU, adopted at the XXII Congress of the CPSU on October 31, 1961, set forth a new discourse – the construction of communism. The program directed the Party organs to conduct systematic scientific atheist propaganda in order to clarify the inconsistency of religious beliefs and establish Marxist-Leninist philosophy as the only true worldview alien to religion. In 1964, on the basis of the decision of the Central Committee of the CPSU, enshrined in the document *Measures to Strengthen the Atheist Upbringing of the Population*, the discipline ‘Scientific Atheism’ was introduced as mandatory in all universities, in the higher educational establishments of the Ministry of Culture, medical, agricultural, pedagogical higher and secondary educational institutions as well, and in all other higher educational establishments as an optional course. It is important to note that a year earlier, in 1963, the discipline ‘Scientific Communism’ was introduced as mandatory according the Order of the Minister of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the USSR entitled *On the Implantation of Teaching a Course on the Fundamentals of Scientific Communism in the Universities of the USSR*. At the same time, scientific communism was treated as one of the three constituent parts of Marxism-Leninism, along with philosophy and political economy. Scientific communism was considered a separate branch of social sciences, that studies the specific laws of the formation of communism, explores the social and political laws and methods of the communistic transformation of society, develops the socio-political substantiation of the historical mission of the working class and the inevitability of the death of capitalism in the process of an objective movement towards communism. In this regard, some social scientists began to strive to identify in Marxism a separate branch similar to scientific communism, but developing a Marxist attitude to religion, that is, to create a “theory of scientific atheism” or a special science – “scientific atheism” (Gorbachev 1966; Kryanev, 1967). Previously, such a desire did not arise as scientific atheism was considered closely related to dialectical materialism, as its integral part (Ermaikov 1958, Yurovskij 1958).

In the mid-1970s, in the Soviet social sciences' press there was a discussion about what atheism is, what it is based on and what it is connected to (Pashkov 1974; Gendel' 1975). The discussion was caused by the opinion of some party ideologists, that the discipline of *Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism* did not sufficiently fulfill its propaganda functions due to its 'science of religion nature'; hence, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education was given the task of revising the program of the course and aim it at "considering the essence of atheism" (Sheptulin 1975, 17). Some social scientists close to the ideological apparatus of the Central Committee of the Party devised the idea that atheism, as a 'negative' phenomenon, cannot characterize the worldview of the most advanced society in the world and that it ought to have some kind of positive component. For example, Mikhail Novikov, Head of the Department of Scientific Atheism at Moscow State University, wrote that, unlike "bourgeois free-thinkers" who only destroy religion, the Soviet scholars explored the "positive aspects of atheistic science", and "the development of positive aspects of atheism in direct connection with the general materialist concept of the historical process raised atheistic science to a qualitatively new level" (Novikov 1975, 30-31). Novikov called for the inclusion of aspects of the moral content of atheism in teaching curricula on scientific atheism (Novikov 1975, 25). Pavel Kurochkin, Director of the Institute of Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the CPSU in one of his publications noted that the Marxist-Leninist theory of scientific atheism consists of three major sections: religious studies, atheism studies and the theory of scientific atheist upbringing. He wrote: "The essence of the first section lays in the scientific disclosure of the failure and reactionary role of religion, the second aspect lays in the study and promotion of *the positive content of scientific atheism* in the development of society, which allows to form a stable optimistic outlook, gives the correct orientation in the world of human relations (italics by the author – *M.Sh.*)" (Kurochkin 1980, 19-20). It only remained to determine the content of the "positive and constructive aspect of scientific atheism", which was supposed to demonstrate its fundamental

difference from pre-Marxist atheism, which only “exposes religion to bare denial” (Kurochkin 1980, 20). That opinion on the existence of positive moral essence of scientific atheism received widespread support (Grishanov 1973; Nikitin, 1977; Kurochkin and Mizov, 1978).

Some Soviet philosophers did not believe that atheism had any special ‘positive content’; they considered atheism a world-view that “completely rejects any belief in the supernatural, in whatever form it is expressed”, and that it “exists only as denial of theism” (Shakhnovich 1973, 86). That was precisely the point of view the founders of Marxism adhered to. Thus, Friedrich Engels wrote in a letter to Eduard Bernstein that “atheism as *a bare denial of religion*, constantly referring to religion, and by itself does not represent anything without it” (Marx and Engels 1956, 598). Engels wrote that people, whose world outlook is free of religion, cease to be interested in it: “About the vast majority of German Social-Democratic workers, one can even say that their atheism is already the stage they have passed; this purely negative designation is no longer applicable to them, since they oppose belief in God no longer theoretically, but practically; they *simply finished with God*, they live and think in the real world, and therefore they are materialists” (Marx and Engels 1956, 598). Thus, from the point of view of classical Marxism, the development of socialism to communism should lead to the withering away of not only religion, but also atheism, since materialism itself is an atheistic world outlook. Therefore, supporters of this point of view among Soviet scholars considered natural science education and the fight against superstition to be the only task of atheistic enlightening,

The historian of Soviet atheism Boris Konovalov wrote that an important place in the ideological and theoretical content of atheistic propaganda belongs to the natural-scientific criticism of religion and the substantiation of atheism from the standpoint of modern science, and that it is the scientific knowledge that is the most important prerequisite for the formation of an atheist materialist worldview, alien to religion: “Modern achievements of natural science, penetration of the human mind into the deep processes of the micro- and macrocosm, into the secrets of the

human psyche, the development of chemistry, cybernetics and other sciences leave less and less “blank spots” in the knowledge of the surrounding world, testify to the unlimited possibilities of the human mind, which does not need any religious sanctions” (Konovalov 1974, 143). These provisions corresponded not only to the spirit and the writings of the founders of Marxism, but also to the entire philosophical enlightening tradition, including the secular humanism that developed in Europe and the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, associated with the development of naturalism, positivism and pragmatism. However, in the theory and practice of scientific atheism in the late 1970s–mid-1980s, it was impossible to mention that someone takes a position common or even close to the ‘bourgeois free-thinkers’.

Despite the fact that the classics of Marxism lack an understanding of atheism as an independent teaching, separate from materialism, at the end of the 1970s, scientific atheism in the Soviet academic space turned into a separate special social science with its own subject of research, its own terminological apparatus, and even with its own separate number in the nomenclature of scientific specialties. At the same time, scientific atheism was opposed to all other forms of atheism as the most consistent and the only true one: “The philosophical basis of Marxist atheism is dialectical and historical materialism, therefore for the first time atheistic views acquire a scientific character. The subject of scientific atheism is the elucidation of the social and epistemological roots, the reasons for the emergence and existence of religion, criticism of religious beliefs from the point of view of the scientific picture of the world, the identification of the social role of religion in society, the determination of ways to overcome religious prejudices” (Frolov 1981, 54).

Published in 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev’s book *Perestroika and New Thinking for Our Country and for the World* played an important role in changing attitudes towards religion. Now these words seem banal, but then, in 1988, relying on Gorbachev’s book, it was possible for the first time in many decades to declare publicly:

“The idea of the unity of the world, despite all its contradictions, of a single civilization, requires taking into account the religious factor in spiritual life of humanity, requires a realistic analysis of the fact that out of five billion people, about four billion people are religious and one billion are atheists. Never before has the issue of the unity of all peoples outside their relationship to the problems of religion been so acute. ... The ideological differences must recede before the common destiny of the human race ... Marxists do not renounce universal human ethical values, even if they originally existed in a religious form, they do not renounce from studying in religion not only its class content” (Shakhnovich 1988, 77).

The country has entered a new period of relations between the State and the Church, believers and atheists, the era of scientific atheism as a separate science had come to an end.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the study of documents and publications of the last two periods of ideological and political work in the field of religion and atheism in the USSR: the period of scientific and atheistic propaganda (since 1954) and the period of scientific and atheistic education (since 1961), allowed in general, to determine how the concept of ‘scientific atheism’ was constructed, how the corresponding philosophical, scientific and educational discourses were formed around it, how it was incorporated into social theory and ideological and political practice and became an important factor in educational policy. However, there are still many aspects of the phenomenon of ‘scientific atheism’ that require investigation.

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Alexander Kopirovsky

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## FR PAVEL FLORENSKY'S CONCEPT OF A 'LIVING MUSEUM' IN THE CONTEXT OF ATHEIST CRITICISM

*In this article, to discover what 'Soviet spirituality' is, the author analyses the collision between two visions for the form and content of a working art-historical museum, created after the October Revolution of 1917 at one of Russia's best-known monasteries – the Holy Trinity–St. Sergius Lavra. One of the visions belonged to the well-known natural scientist and theologian, who from 1911 was also a priest – Fr Pavel Florensky. In his vision, Florensky tried to develop ideas related to a new sensibility and comprehension of works of church art. In the period of his creativity immediately prior to this, in his book The Pillar and Ground of the Truth (1914), Florensky had been able to show that ancient icons were not primitive art, and that they needed to be interpreted primarily as a complex, metaphysical phenomenon.*

*In later articles (1918–1929), written in the period before his arrest and subsequent execution by firing squad in 1937, he developed an integral concept for a 'living museum'. Through such a museum church architecture, frescoes, iconography, applied church art (useful objects), music, etc., all exist together in an environment, which is completely natural to them and in connection with the liturgical life of the church / service to God. For Florensky, the brightest example of such a 'living museum' was the Holy Trinity–St. Sergius Lavra, a monastery complex in greater Moscow (15<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries) with a rich history, which had preserved artistic treasures of international significance.*

*The reception of Florensky's concept with regard to the activity of museums alone, would be outside the integral, and in many ways utopian, context of Florensky's thought, which is directed at global change in culture and at the "destruction of the watershed of world spirituality" (Sergei Khoruzhky), i.e. toward the completion of a synthesis between the culture of antiquity and Christian culture. Therefore, the embodiment of Florensky's*

*idea only in the context of a museum would only be just another form of 'Soviet spirituality', albeit not as radical as earlier expressions thereof.*

*Keywords: 'living museum', Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, Fr Pavel Florensky, Mikhail Galkin, atheist critique, 'Soviet spirituality'*

The article below is dedicated to the phenomenon of spirituality in Russia in the first years after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917. Despite the fact that the repressions of the clergy (Emeljanov 2004) began almost immediately after the Revolution, and that in 1918 the new authorities passed laws with the anti-church content, which separated the church from the state and schools from the church (Valk 1957, 371–374), bearers of the tradition of Russian Christian spirituality were still able to exist and openly express their views during this time. First and foremost, the highly educated among the clergy and church intelligentsia did precisely this.

On the other hand, at the same time a class of representatives of communist ideology were no less outspoken, and one of their primary principles was the battle against religion (Lenin 1968, 418). Atko Rimmel and Mikko Sillfors noted that it was a characteristic particularity of western philosophical thought that atheism always comes together with materialism, naturalism, rationalism, and various other strands of thought which *a priori* stand against religion and contradict the possibility of existence outside this world (Rimmel and Sillfors 2018, 1). The same sort of contradiction of spirituality as traditionality understood – in fact in an even more radical form – is found in Soviet atheism from the first years of Soviet power.

As a consequence of the ideological orientation towards atheism in the USSR, the understanding of 'spirituality' itself was practically eliminated from the scientific and cultural lexicon within the course of about 50 years. Only in the mid-1960s, under the observation of Viktoria Smolkin-Rothrok, there was an attempt made to transition from the battle with religion, with which the understanding of spirituality was

linked to a battle for “Soviet spiritual life” (Smolkin–Rothrock 2014, 175–176). The expression ‘spirituality’ came into common use even later in the USSR, between 1984 and 1989, during the period when M. Gorbachev the political leader (Kolkunova and Malevich 2014, 74).

‘Soviet spirituality’ differs categorically, in its atheist content, from the ‘secular spirituality’ which arose in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the juxtaposition between humanities and natural sciences (W. Dilthey, then E. Spranger) though without a conflict with the tradition of the Christian church (this, despite the fact that in Russian the words *sovetskij*=soviet and *svetskij*=secular differ by only a single letter!). The phenomenon of Soviet spirituality has been a research topic on a regular basis since the fall of the Soviet Union, as is reflected in both Russian and international scholarly literature. Mikhail Popov defined ‘Soviet spirituality’ as a social archetype in which “spiritual values...could only be the subject of a collective faith (‘communist ideological morality’) in the existence of higher values which supersede the human person but nevertheless connect people” (Popov 2004, 21). Zaur Kachetsukov spoke in the same way of communist spirituality: “The particularity of this type of spirituality was the sacralization of ideals which were of a materialist character” (Khachetsunov 2007, 11).

Viktor Slobodchikov wrote of the fact that ‘spirituality’ during the Soviet era was limited to the realm of cultural products and various forms of art – and, at that, within an ideological context (Slobodchikov 2013, 317). Commenting on this fact, Andrey Andreev, an author who is among the most recent of those who have written on ‘Soviet spirituality’, supports Slobodchikov. Moreover, he quite justifiably notes that the convergence of spirituality and various expressions of cultural and ideology *in principle* limit and distort the contents of spiritual development. The reason for this, he says, is that the goal of such development becomes not the disclosure of the highest spiritual qualities of the person, but the creation of a ‘collective person’, as the limited element of socialist production (Andreev 2017a, 5). A very sturdy picture of the way in which a person perceives the world is painted for the benefit of this collective person, the

main aim of which is to aid in providing a basis for the existence of the political regime and the development of a society which corresponds to it (Andreev 2017b, 26–27).

To conclude, according to the research of Irina Gosteva, there are 20 traditional marks of traditional Christian spiritual content, which is, at base, Russian, and in the Soviet lexicon only 8 of these remain: responsibility, law, love, morality, soul, patriotism, conscience and honesty. Those words and understanding which had been practically expunged from the lexicon and fell out of use were those words which had their provenance in religion, including: grace, blessed, faith, spirit, spirituality, truth/authenticity (*istina*), *sobornost*, salvation, chastity, and others (Gosteva 2008, 36).

To clarify the reasons for such a significant change in the conscious working cognitive assumptions vis-à-vis spirituality in such a large mass of people, we need to look at the very beginning of the process, i.e. the first years after the revolution of October 1917. Here, the direct conflict between the two types of spirituality – traditional Russian (Christian) and new Soviet (atheist) spirituality – must be analysed. An example, in this case, might be the texts of Fr. Pavel Florensky and his atheist opponent Mikhail Galkin (Gorev), which were written in 1918 and 1919, in connection to Florensky's development of a concept for a Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra Museum.

The opposing positions of Florensky and Galkin on the question of turning the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra into a museum have never been considered side by side in the scholarly literature. This is an omission, which will be prevented, at least in part, in the article which follows.

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Fr. Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) was a leading scholar of the natural sciences, theology, cultural studies, poetry, etc. (see Fig. No 1) His student and follower, Fr. Sergei Bulgakov, who then became one of the best-known Orthodox Christian theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote of Florensky, "I knew him as a mathematician and physicist, theologian and



Figure 1. Fr Pavel Florensky, 1911 r. Anonymous photographer. Available on: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Pavel\\_Florensky#/media/File:Pavel\\_Florensky.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Pavel_Florensky#/media/File:Pavel_Florensky.jpg)

linguist, philosopher, historian of religion and poet...an expert in and valuer of art, and a serious mystic” (Bulgakov 1987, 512).

Florensky began to study sacred art, and most specifically ancient icons, as early as the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his widely known book, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, which was published in 1914, he establishes the spiritual and artistic value of an icon, convincingly rebutting the prevailing opinion of the time, which considered icons to be ‘dark and gloomy’, and ‘primitive’. He wrote, “For those in darkness the souls and faces of the saints grow dark, for those who are paralyzed, their bodies become frozen in a terrible inanimacy [...] But clear eyes see the faces of the saints as shining” (Florensky 1914, 3).

Florensky started working on the question of outfitting a museum of church art at Sergeev Posad directly after the October Revolution in 1917, when the new authorities tried to take measures to address the problem of pillaging, and in some cases the outright destruction, of artifacts and monuments of historical artistic value. One such measure was the creation, by the People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment, of a Commission for the Preservation of Historical Monuments and Art at the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra. This new Commission invited Florensky to be their

academic secretary. The Commission was almost completely made up of believing Orthodox Christians, and began its work with the blessing of Patriarch Tikhon. Within a short time, they were able to account for an enormous number of items of historical-cultural artistic value at the Lavra, as well as at the estates and manor houses in the immediate vicinity.

The plan to make the Lavra into a museum was drawn up by Florensky together with Pavel Kapterev by 9 December, 1918 (Andronik 2008, 22–27). It was in this instance and for this purpose that the term 'living museum' was used for the first time, to signify the preservation of each object, in so far as was possible, in the context of its appearance/emergence and subsequent life (Andronik 2008, 23). Florensky and Kapterev believed that the designation 'Lavra Museum', in the true meaning of the term, could only be used with regard to the entire Lavra, itself, rather than exclusively in regard to a special museum building on its grounds. Although it was assumed that such building should be built within the grounds, they did not see this building as having any particular significance or separate designation for itself; it was to be there only to assist with informing people about the Lavra as a 'living museum' (Andronik 2008, 24).

The heart of the 'living museum' was to become, in accordance with the museum's concept, the living liturgy being served in the churches of the Lavra understood as a 'synthesis of the arts', including architecture, frescoes, icons, items for use in the church service, vestments, readings in the churches, singing, the movements of the priests and even "the art of smoke and flame", i.e. the candles and incense from the servers' sensing. (*Church in Action as a Synthesis of the Arts* was the name of Florensky's article in which he anticipates the above-described plan for turning the Lavra into a museum; Florensky 1996, 370–382).

The entire concept for the 'living museum' was laid out by Florensky in the article *Holy Trinity–St. Sergius Lavra and Russia* (December 1918), in which he depicted the Lavra as the spiritual centre and symbol of Russia – as an 'icon' of Russia's life and culture of art from the 14<sup>th</sup> through the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Florensky 1996, 352–369).



Florensky underscored the necessity of perceiving the historical and artistic items and monuments of the Lavra only as an integrated whole in which all the individual elements are interconnected, founded upon service to God and unceasingly being perfected in this service. Thanks to this, the Lavra turned out to be more than the sum of its parts as a collection of individual architectural elements, paintings, practical art, etc., and was one of the images of heaven on earth. As Sergei Khoruzhy, a leading scholar of Florensky's creative heritage, has written, "the mythology of Eden is laid firmly at the foundation of Florensky's thought. The original perfect condition of the world and the human person which was laid to waste in the fall of Adam and is once again being returned. This healing return to the unharmed reality of 'Eden'...is accomplished by the Church, and in her traditional language this reality is called 'sanctified'. Concrete and direct sanctification is being forged in the ecclesial cult" (Khoruzhy 1990, 6).

Florensky saw the Lavra's founder, St. Sergius of Radonezh, as its centre in terms of spirit and meaning. He saw its visible centre as the church services in the Church of the Holy Trinity, where since the 15<sup>th</sup> century St. Sergius's relics had been located. The Lavra itself, in perspective, he called 'Christian Athens', where a harmonious union of the sciences, the arts, and crafts and trades all come together in a general spirit of creativity (Florensky 1996, 369).

The Article entitled *Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra and Russia* was intended for publication at the beginning of 1919 in a collection of the Commission's works under the general title *Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra* (see Fig. No 2). However, the 2000 copies of the collection were not ever bound; they were simply thrown into the attic of one of the buildings in the Lavra and subsequently almost completely perished (Florensky 1996, 763).

The reason for this was a denunciatory article in the journal *Revoljutsia i tserkovj* (Revolution and the Church) in March-May, 1919. The article published an excerpt from the 8<sup>th</sup> Department of the People's Commissariat for Justice of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist

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Figure 2. Cover for the collection of articles drawn up by the Commission for the Preservation of the cultural heritage at the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, 1919 (with Florensky's article *The Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra and Russia*) Anonymous photographer. Available on: <https://www.soyuz.ru/literature/946401>; <https://www.icon-art.info/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?p=6032>



*Figure 3.* Mikhail Galkin (Gorev), the early 1920s. Anonymous photographer. Available on: <https://sozecatel-51.livejournal.com/2003289.html>, in commentaries of anastasiarahlis

Republic, about bringing in a decree on the separation of church and state. One of the primary authors of this decree and a permanent consultant for the Soviet authorities' main agency of repression, the All-Russian Special Commission for Combating Counter-revolution, Sabotage and Speculation (or 'Cheka'), was the former Orthodox priest Mikhail Galkin (see Fig. No 3).<sup>1</sup>

In order to have a full impression of 'Soviet spirituality', a few words need to be said about the remarkably colourful biography of this man – one of the 'Soviet spirituality' representatives. Before the Revolution, Galkin was active in the Church, an associate priest (2<sup>nd</sup> in command at a parish) and then the head parish priest at the Spaso-Koltovsky parish in St. Petersburg. He was a well-known fighter for sobriety among the

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<sup>1</sup> "Revoljutsia i tserkovj", 1919, March-May, No.3-5, p.74-76; reproduced in full in the book: (Florensky 1996, 763–765). In one of the notes to this article Galkin directly commands that the collected works of the Commission on which Florensky served should be banned from distribution by the Head of the Department for the Affairs of Museums and the Preservation of Historical Monuments of the People's Commissariat of the Russia Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, N.N. Sedova-Trotskaja (the wife of the second in command in Soviet Russian at the end of the 1910s and in the 1920s, L.D. Trotsky).

people and a fruitful author on that topic and others, including pilgrimage, people who were examples of spiritual bravery, etc. He wrote under the pseudonym M. Gorev (probably not entirely a coincidence that this sounds very like the pseudonym chosen by a well-known proletariat writer – Maxim Gorky), and he had around 60 published works. In addition, Galkin was a volunteer participant of the First World War (as a priest), and in 1916 was awarded the Order of St Anna (3<sup>rd</sup> degree) with swords for his bravery.

However, in November 1917, after the Bolsheviks had come to power, Galkin the priest went personally to Lenin with a proposal to serve the new authorities in any capacity, declaring that he had changed his worldview after becoming familiar with Marxist literature. At the recommendation of Lenin, he wrote a letter to the Council of People's Commissars with a rabidly anti-church article attached, in which he laid out the basis for the future Decree on separation of church and state. This article was then published in *Pravda* (The Truth) and a host of other newspapers, under the initials M.G. In his letter, Galkin wrote: "I'm pulled toward active work. I want to build, fight, suffer, celebrate...and in my cassock I'm a living corpse! And if you would take this immeasurable weight off my shoulders, do it but quickly! I will be immeasurably grateful to you."<sup>2</sup> He made no reference to his active church work previous to that time.

We need to add to our characterization of Galkin that over the course of several months at the front during the war he received a double salary (both from the army and from his parish), to which he had no right. Then he voluntarily left his regiment, and having returned to Petrograd, promised in writing to return the money which he had received illegally. But he never did return the money. When he submitted his documents to the Soviet authorities, Galkin wrote that he had completed studies both at the Military Medical Academy and at the Faculty of Law of St. Petersburg University; however, he only studied for several months at each of these institutions. Moreover, in his biography he wrote that he had been

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<sup>2</sup> See Krapivin 2020, 102.

persecuted by the Tsarist government and by the Church leaders, though in fact this was not the case; he also concealed their adulation of his service in the form of the stamp of the Metropolitan Anthony (Vadkovskij), and the fact that he had received in his church both Grigory Rasputin, the well-known – in a sad sense – favourite of the Tsar, and Rasputin’s follower, Bishop Pitirim (Oknov). In July 1918, Galkin publicly renounced his priesthood and joined the Communist Party.<sup>3</sup>

In his article mentioned above that was published in the journal *Revoljutsia i tserkovj* under the self-explanatory title *Black board* (which was apparently an allusion to the darkness of icons and in this context would have symbolized the ‘gloom’ of church culture as a whole), Galkin demanded the investigation of the Commission for the Preservation of Historical Monuments and Art at the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra and similar commissions in other cities. He accused these commissions of striving to “‘preserve’ all that was old and ecclesial from liquidation including church structure, house churches (*here it is unclear why, specifically, house churches and why only these; clearly this was all written in as polemic to create controversy – author’s note*) and even whole monasteries under the pretext of their ‘questionable’ historical, archaeological or simply practical day-to-day (!) value”.<sup>4</sup> Insofar as the words ‘preserve’ and ‘questionable’ were set off by Galkin in quotation marks, it is clear that he contradicts their positive content. In addition, the fact that he inserts an exclamation point after the word that means ‘practical day-to-day’, makes it even more clear that he is expressing his opinion that not only churches and monasteries, but any ecclesial activity has no place in the new atheist state.

Galkin’s critical arguments may be summarized as follows:

1. “Heaps of the finest paper” have been wasted on publication of the Commission’s works (his words about waste of quality paper he repeats twice, and on the second occasion calls the paper ‘the finest

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<sup>3</sup> See Krapivin 2020; Krapivin and Makarov 2014; Rogoznij 2013; Abanina and Petrov 2018.

<sup>4</sup> See Florensky 1996, 765.

paper'), and in addition the typographical ink "which is as valuable as gold" has been wasted (this sort of hyperbole is characteristic of Galkin).

2. On the publication's title page, which he called 'church-apologetic' is the stamp of a state agency, the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment (which established the Commission), the presence of which Galkin says is at odds with the religious content of the document itself. The brochure itself has been paid for by the government budget. Moreover, Galkin scolds the Commission for its intention to create a school of art and iconography at the Lavra. Then, waxing eloquent about the irony that the Commission is at present unable to boast any examples of 'high-class Russian culture', he fails to mention that on 7 December, 1918, the Commission completed – upon its own initiative – the restoration of a whole host of ancient icons, the most noteworthy of which was Andrey Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity.<sup>5</sup>
3. Florensky's designation of St. Sergiis of Radonezh as a "national hero of Russia", a man in which "the people of Russia recognize themselves, their cultural-historical home, and their task as a culture", "a particular...guardian and helper of the Russian empire", etc. Galkin calls an attempt to give St. Sergius "a political role". In other words, the activity of St. Sergius of Radonezh is perceived by Galkin only in the context of strengthening state royal power, without any reference to the saint being an inspiring figure in terms of his spiritual battle against the Tatar-Mongol Yoke or his role as a peacemaker between warring princes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The restoration of Rublev's icon "was begun at the initiative of and carried out as a task of the Commission for the restoration of ancient Russian painting, in which participated the likes of I.E. Grabar, A.I. Anisimov, K.K. Romanov, and the Commission for the Preservation of Historical Monuments and Art of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra (Yu.A. Olsufev, P.A. Florensky, P.N.Kaptirev)"; Malkov 1987, 245–247.

<sup>6</sup> See: Kluchevskij 1991.

4. The need to keep the relics of St. Sergius, moreover in state and with honour, “using all the achievements of high-class Russian art and church display” at his sepulchre, are presented in Galkin’s article as the exclusive desire of the Commission to make of the Lavra, “something akin to a Russian Vatican”.<sup>7</sup>

This final argument is a lie, insofar as in his concept of a ‘living museum’ Florensky did not suppose any central-administrative activity within the walls of the Lavra, and was even against the creation of a museum of the commonly known secular or church-historical type – for the safe-keeping and display of artifacts – on the territory of the Lavra. In his article, *Church in Action as a Synthesis of the Arts*, he wrote: “I would understand the fanatical demand to destroy the Lavra in such a way as to leave no stone standing in the name of the religion of socialism; but I decisively refuse to understand the mentality of a cultural register...which jealously seeks to preserve icons, wall frescos and the walls themselves, yet is indifferent to the other thing which is no less precious an achievement of ancient culture and in being indifferent fails even to take into account the highest goal of all this art, which was their extreme synthesis, so successfully and uniquely resolved in the church activity of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra (Florensky 1996, 381–382).

Galkin’s arguments, listed above, would more accurately not be called criticism of Florensky’s concept of a ‘living museum’, but aggressive invectives against both it and its author, insofar as Galkin does not use any respectable and grounded scholarly propositions to make his case. Galkin’s article itself is primarily about its author’s sincere desire to destroy the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra in one way or another, given that to the new Soviet authorities it is a hateful symbol of the old Russia. In terms of an alternative proposal to the ‘living museum’, Galkin wrote an article in the same issue of *Revoljutsia i tserkovj*, and another in the following issue, under the common title, *Holy Trinity Lavra and Sergius of Radonezh*, which were obviously positioned by him in opposition to the unpublished

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<sup>7</sup> See: Florensky 1996, 764.

article of Florensky, and filled with abusive joking toward the monks, who in his opinion had so poorly preserved the artistic heritage of their monastery (Gorev 1919). In this article he proposed that the Lavra be turned into an historical museum, that the icons be hung in a picture gallery, and that the relics ('bones') of St. Sergius of Radonezh should be sent "to one of the Moscow museums at the department of church history, or they would just need to be buried" (Gorev 1919, 48). Galkin was not alone in his endeavour to practically destroy the Lavra as a monastery. On 26 January, 1920, representative Rosenthal of the 'Cheka' in heading a meeting on the closing of the Lavra stated, "I assert that the Holy Trinity- St. Sergius Lavra is a rot in the flesh of Soviet Russia and must be cut out in one way or another."<sup>8</sup>

Florensky's concept, according to which the Lavra is a 'living museum' and does not require transformation into a specially outfitted museum, was received as a naïve attempt to preserve the Lavra from destruction not only at the hands of the atheists. Orthodox researcher Nikolay Gavriushin attests to this saying, "It became necessary for apologists for Christian culture (*he means Florensky – author's note*) to focus on saving material valuables (Gavriushin 2011, 481). This opinion is also shared by Margarita Gaganova, the chief scholarly employee of the currently functioning museum in Sergeev Posad, the main portion of which is, indeed, on the territory of the Lavra. Gaganova says, "In an era of 'cavalier attacks' upon the church, the Christian apology of the monastery 'peaking through the lines' would not have gone unnoticed..." (Gaganova 2019). Florensky's nephew, however, Abbot Andronik (Trubachov), thought that the concept of a 'living museum' was not an apology for the Lavra in the way it had been preserved by the beginning of the Soviet era, but that Florensky was addressing the future Russia, in which the Orthodox Church would no longer be persecuted: "There is no question that he developed his theory in the museum case using as a reference a time still awaited, when people will have overcome and outlived their nihilism" (Andronik 2008, 19).

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<sup>8</sup> See Andronik 2008, 53.



A number of researchers support the idea that Florensky's museum concept is fruitful, some of which believe that it is possible to embody, in the most general terms, in museums which already exist. Professor Ilona Kishsh, for example, believes that Florensky's text is an "absolutely serious recommendation", and model for "active reception of culture's historical heritage" (Kishsh 2015, 10). Museum employees Larisa Alekseeva and Lyudmila Olenich suggest that modern museums of church art should choose between "a classical museum of the pavilion type" and a dynamically evolving museum, in which elements of Florensky's 'living museum' would be used (Alekseeva and Olenich 2017, 119).

It must be said, however, that a rushed practical embodiment of these ideas could end up in attempts to perceive Florensky's concept more in the manner of 'Soviet spirituality'. Unlike the sincere endeavour of representatives of Soviet power in the first years of its existence to destroy the Lavra if not immediately, to at least limit its activity – primarily in terms of its liturgical life and in terms of the opportunities it presented for spiritual communion between monks and pilgrims with the Lavra's founder, St. Sergius of Radonezh (in particular the veneration of his relics) – in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the museification of church culture was allowed and even welcomed. Nevertheless, such spirituality is still conceived of in categories which are divorced from liturgy and from expressions of the Christian worldview and life. Florensky certainly did not believe that his task, we repeat ourselves, was the creation of a perfected and updated museum of church culture in an atheistic country. This would have been too similar to the International Museum of Christian Archaeology, created by the AntiChrist, that Vladimir Solovyov describes in his literary-philosophical work, *Three Conversations* (Solovyov 1990, 752–753).

With his concept, Florensky was more likely proposing a utopian, rather than a real project for the 'enlivening' and transformation of the Holy Trinity–St. Sergius Lavra, in many aspects based on idealized ideas about its past; to embody this in the form of a typical museum, however,

would have been something more like anti-utopia (Kopirovskij 2020). The deep content of Florensky's concept was an aim to resolve global, recurring tasks which were greater than the needs of the museum project and which presupposed many possible variations in terms of its realization. Moreover, we need to keep in mind that the principle aim of Florensky's thought, which he inherited from Solovyov, was to resolve the question of pan-unity.<sup>9</sup> He saw the key to this resolution in overcoming the juxtaposition between the culture of antiquity and Christian culture, between which, as Khoruzhy has written, lies "the great watershed of global spirituality". Florensky endeavoured not only to designate where waters part in terms of thought, but also to "destroy the greatest of the watersheds" (Khoruzhy 1990, 12). As such, Florensky set himself a task equivalent in meaning to that of the early medieval cultural synthesis, but on the level of scientific knowledge which was contemporary for him. His concept of a 'living museum' was called to help bring about that synthesis.

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<sup>9</sup> According to his son, the scholar, geochemist and planetary scientist Kirill Florensky, he was especially interesting in that he tried to create a general worldview...in which a person would feel integrated and whole" (Andronik 2011, 13).

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**Ekaterina Teryukova**

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## **CENTRAL ANTI-RELIGIOUS MUSEUM IN MOSCOW: FROM ANTI-RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION**

*The paper examines the Central Anti-Religious Museum (CAM) in Moscow in 1926-1947 and its activities on the anti-religious propaganda and the study of religion. It was established by a resolution of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (VKPb) and became the first anti-religious museum in the USSR.*

*Being recognized as a Research Institution of National Importance by the Council of People's Commissars in 1934 the Museum performed a variety of important functions on aggregating data about provincial museums, developing guidelines on methodology of anti-religious museum work, organizing field works and study of religious practices of the USSR ethnic groups.*

*As a result, by the late 1930s, the Museum developed from anti-religious propaganda establishment into research center and was renamed the Central Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism on 20 February 1942.*

*Keywords: anti-religious propaganda, study of religion, atheism, museums.*

The foundation of the Central Anti-Religious Museum, or CAM, was laid in the spring of 1926, when the meeting under the auspices of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party made a series of decisions on anti-religious propaganda and proclaimed the organization of a specialized anti-religious museum institution as a necessary measure. At the same time, the Chairman of the League of Militant Atheists, or LMA, Emelyan Yaroslavsky received a report from Boris Kandidov

regarding a museum project developed by historians of religion and atheism propagandists: Mikhail Sheinman, Fyodor Kovalev, and Mikhail Pokrovsky. According to the project, its main goal was anti-religious advocacy and propaganda. However, even at this preliminary level, research and data and artefact collecting were mentioned as no less important areas of work. For that purpose, it was planned to create the Museum archives, a library, and a collection of objects as well as to hire a team of highly qualified experts. In the words of Kandidov, all this was going to make the CAM “a large research institution working towards the spiritual liberation of the working class, a place of living creativity” (Kandidov 2012, 273).

Later, in the 1930s, Boris Kandidov gave a full account of the Museum’s foundation in his memoir, *The Way of Struggle (A Memoir of Organizing the Central Anti-Religious Museum)*. In his book, he wrote that what had led him to the foundation of the Museum was the teaching experience and anti-religious work with general public that he had gained in the 1920s. It proved to him that visual demonstration was an effective methodology. He wrote: “Lectures, talks, discussions, all sorts of staged performances yielded good results, but we had to demonstrate the truth of our point of view to the audience of workers and peasants in a persuasive and vivid way: through documents, paintings, and a variety of artistic display objects” (Kandidov 2012, 273).

The doors of the former Strastnoi Monastery in Moscow opened to welcome the visitors of the new Central Anti-Religious Museum on June 10, 1929. The event was timed to coincide with the 2nd Congress of the League of Militant Atheists founded in 1925 and dispersed in 1947. The Museum was run under its auspices. At the time, it was the first museum of its kind in the USSR and the only one in the world.

We have learnt what the Museum was like during its first years and how it could surprise its visitors from a rather unusual source. It is an article written by two of the museum visitors, Lothar Wolf and Martha Ruben-Wolf, and published in a popular German newspaper *Berlin am Morgen* in August 1930. The title of the article was typical for its time – ‘Opium for the Masses’ (Archive 237). It said:

“In Moscow, on Strastnaya Square, there stands the almost-300-year-old Strastnoi Monastery. These are ill times for monasteries in Russia. Believers pay little, and the state, which used to be very generous towards monasteries in the old days, is now the Soviet State and not only gives no more, but also demands taxes. Therefore, the impoverished and dilapidated monastery recently ceased to exist due to hygienic and sanitary reasons. This ghost of tsarist spiritual slavery has been transformed into the Central Anti-Religious Museum, which, with the help of propaganda, attracts the view even from the outside. Thus, on the First of May, the figure of the ruling capital stood high on its façade holding Orthodox priests, rabbis, clergymen, and mullahs on a leash.”

The entrance to the Museum is decorated with posters. For example, a huge rich peasant holds an icon up to the sky, for the sheer foolishness of it, and tries hard to catch the foot of a poorer small-sized peasant in a rope loop. The poorer peasant, however, is smart and aware, so he jumps out of the loop, points to his forehead, and shouts, ‘Enough lies!’. The authors then noted that “the nature of propaganda changes once the spectator enters the permanent exhibition located in three church rooms, where he is offered the most sophisticate, deeply elaborated teachings” on a variety of topics. For example, to answer the question of human origin, “very simply, clearly, in a way accessible even to the illiterate, the pictures present the development of plants, animals, and humans themselves” in accordance with Darwin’s theory of the evolution of the species. The authors then asked themselves what those scientific achievements had to do with religion and answered, “All religions have fought against scientific knowledge. But god has nothing to do with his horrible priests doing evil”. Therefore, another question that the museum’s exhibition answered for the international guests was, “What is god? How does god originate and develop?” That was the subject of the section entitled *The Origin and Development of Religion*, which told the story of “how Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Slavs came to create concepts of god”. A special subsection covered the religions of



India, China, and Japan. A separate great hall told the story of the origins of Christianity. The creators of the exhibition had not failed to draw their attention to the burning issues of contemporary religious life. The section with a self-explanatory title of *Religion as a Capitalist Enterprise* demonstrated that religions “have long become just a weapon of the ruling exploiters, first and foremost, the capitalist class”. The authors of the article described that, along with authentic objects, the exhibition showcased “countless pictures, figures, tables, and geographical maps”, as well as set scenes, such as those of a church stall selling icons, painted Easter eggs, wax candles etc. The latter scene was supposed to demonstrate “how one needs to be a skilful manager in order to gain income”. To demonstrate how much “the churches had earned” from the cult of incorruptible relics, “mummified saints” were “displayed in their glass coffins”. The review closed with a mention of group tours for schoolchildren and factory workers that the authors had witnessed during their Museum visit. The Museum “was teeming with spectators [and] where there used to be an altar, there was now a geographical map showing the locations throughout the Soviet Union that boasted anti-religious exhibitions inspired by the Central Anti-Religious Museum”. To conclude, the authors expressed their hope that museums like that one “would spread across Germany as well”.

In 1931, the Decree of the Collegium of the People’s Commissariat for Education on Anti-Religious Museum Construction was published (Archive 3). The Decree acknowledged “an unsatisfactory state of anti-religious museum construction” (“an almost complete lack of anti-religious work in museums, lack of planned construction of anti-religious museums, insufficient guidance of anti-religious work on the part of the People’s Commissariat for Education and LMA organizations, weak material support of the existing anti-religious museums, not enough personnel”). It also ordered “all museums without exception, notwithstanding their type” to engage in “anti-religious propaganda in exhibitions, labels, guided tours, private consultations, political and educational events for the general audience, in accordance with their set goals”. The anti-religious

propaganda was to be rooted in promoting the dialectical materialist understanding of nature and society, uncovering the social roots of religion and the counter-revolutionary nature of religious organisations, unmasking the role religion played in the fight against the international workers' movement and national liberation movement. The Decree also noted that anti-religious exhibitions in museums of different types, including anti-religious museums, were supposed to contain a large number of items related to natural sciences, society, history, and technology. The Science Section of the People's Commissariat for Education and the Central Council of the LMA were ordered to organize a network of anti-religious museums in regional centres within the following month. The museums were allowed not to have a special anti-religious section only if "a museum-wide anti-religious exhibition was provided". The Decree also described a country-wide network of anti-religious museums. The Central Anti-Religious Museum became the head of the network and was ascribed all-union significance. The State Anti-Religious Museum in Leningrad located in St. Isaac's Cathedral was labelled as an anti-religious museum of republican significance. The lower levels of the network were occupied by anti-religious museums and anti-religious sections of local history museums in regional centres and their counterparts in district local history museums. In regional museums, the main accent was to be placed on specific materials that characterized the role of religion in the area.

This decree was the bases for the CAM's Action Plan for 1932. Its goal was "to use the exhibition to mobilize the attention of the workers on meeting the objectives of the fourth and final year" (Archive 14, 1) of the first five-year plan and to prepare the objectives for the second one. In terms of exhibitions, this meant "a final re-organization of the CAM founded on the principles of Marxism-Leninism" and "a review of the whole display along the lines of strict Marxist ideology based on the directive orders in the letter addressed by Comrade Stalin to the editors of the journal *Proletarian Revolution*" as well as replacing of all two-dimensional display items by three-dimensional ones and making the display more dynamic. The latter goal meant that items on display would be

regularly replaced “to provide for timely and appropriate reflection of the tumultuous speed of Socialist construction, the most important political events in the USSR and capitalist countries by the respective Sections” (Archive 14, 1).

At the time, the Museum display consisted of seven large sections: ‘The Dialectics of Nature’, ‘Religion in Pre-Class Society’, ‘Religion in Slave Society’, ‘Religion in Western European and Russian Feudal Society’, ‘Religion in Capitalist Society in the West and in Russia’, ‘Religion in Transition Society’, and ‘Islam’. According to the Action Plan, all of them had to undergo a final artistic decoration and expansion through adding more three-dimensional objects, authentic art objects and documents: paintings, engravings, printed matter.

As for ‘The Dialectics of Nature’, expansion meant “to provide a clearer, more vivid emphasis on the elements of dialectics, create the diagram of the development of the animal world, to provide a display of the laws of conservation of matter and energy, to give a more vivid demonstration of the reactionary, socially harmful role of religious tales and beliefs about the world, the earth, and the human” (Archive 14, 2).

The section ‘Religion in Pre-Class Society’ was planned to provide an illustration of the social role of religion in this socio-economic formation, list a great number of remnants of this formation in contemporary times, to give a clearer diagram of group kinship, make and exhibit models of Upper Palaeolithic dwellings, create an appropriate exhibit of a Neolithic burial site.

In section ‘Religion in Slave Society’, it was needed ‘to review significantly the existing display of all topics and subtopics, “emphasize the characteristic traits of this formation and its religion, to give a deeper and more vivid view of class struggle in Ancient Greek and Roman society, to extend and expand the topic of ‘Science and Philosophy’, to uncover the social root of early Christianity” (Archive 14, 3).

The subsection on ‘Religion in Western European Feudal Society’ set the goal to renovate the following topics: The Crusades, Papacy, Religion and the Masses, Inquisition, The Fight of Religion Against Science,

Atheism. New topics were to be introduced: Woman in Feudal Society, University and School. A torture chamber scene was to be installed, a sculpture of the Grand Inquisitor was to be erected, and the figures of a knight and a monk were to be made.

In the subsection on 'Religion in Russian Feudal Society', new topics were to be explored: Dual Faith and Orthodoxy as an Industry Cult, The Church at the Service of Tsarist Colonialist Missionary Work, The Dictatorship of the Church, Church Publishing, Religion and Women, Class Nature of Sects and Old Believers, The Fight of Religion Against Science, Atheism. The topic of 'Early Feudalism' was to be appended with a diagram or model titled 'Monastery Jail'.

In the subsection on 'Religion in Capitalist Society in the West', several topics had to be reorganized (Atheists of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, The Second Empire, Religion and Science, The Atheist Movement), new topics were to be introduced (Marx and Engels on Religion, Religion and Imperialism, Religion and the Colonialist Movement, Religion and the Workers' Movement), the topic of 'Religion and the World War' was to be finalized.

New topics were to appear in the subsection on 'Religion in Capitalist Society in Russia': Missionary Work in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, The Fight of Religion Against Science, Atheism in Russia, Religion and Schools, Publishing, Art, Religion and Women, Religion and Army, Sects and Their Class Nature, The Crisis of the State Church. "To show the activities of religious organizations in the Tsarist fight against the revolutionary movement more" became another objective (Archive 14, 4).

For the section 'Religion in Transition Society', the proposal was to review the display and expand the following topics: Religion and the February Revolution, Counter-Revolutionary Activities of Religious Organizations, Religion at the Service of Imperialism, The Anti-God Movement Abroad, Anti-Religious and International Upbringing, Anti-Religious Publishing, Socialist Construction in the Third and Fourth Years of the Five-Year Plan, Atheists and the Fight for the So-Called Six Conditions of Comrade Stalin (economic and political activities aimed at raising

labour productivity). This section was also supposed to be expanded through several new topics: Lenin on Religion, The 17<sup>th</sup> Party Conference and Its Directives, Socialist Construction According to the Second Five-Year Plan, Social Harm Caused by Religious Holidays and Old Life.

The goal of the 'Islam' section was to show 'the role Islam played at the service of Imperialism and national exploiters', socialist construction in the regions populated by Muslims, counter-revolutionary activities of Muslim clerics during the October Revolution, the Civil War, and the Five-Year Plan, Islam in everyday life (Archive 14, 5). It was also required to provide the history of atheism.

The Plan for 1932 also mentioned the section 'Shamanism', where the following topics were supposed to be presented in greater detail: Religion at the Service of Tsarist Colonial Policy Among the Peoples of the North, Mythology, Dogmas and Cult in Shamanism, Counter-Revolutionary Activities of Shamans Between October 1917 and 1932, Socialist Construction Among the Peoples of the North, the Anti-God Movement and the Work of the LMA Among the Shamanists. The section on 'Buddhism-Lamaism' was supposed to provide a broader presentation of the following topics: Datsans as the Centres of Exploitation and Political Oppression of the Masses by Lamas, Counter-Revolutionary Activities of Lamas, Religion and Old Life, Socialist Construction in the Areas of Lamaism. New topics were going to be introduced as well: Buddhism and Lamaism at the Service of Imperialism, the Plan for Socialist Construction During the Second Five-Year Plan, Anti-Religious Movement and the Work of LMA Among Lamaists, Anti-Religious Publishing. More new sections were being planned: 'Judaism', 'Catholicism', 'Protestantism'. However, as the documentation from 1933 shows, none of those sections were to be implemented.

The Museum's work included not only improvements to its permanent display, but also organizing a large number of exhibitions, both in the Museum itself and outside. For example, it was supposed to hold anti-Easter and anti-Christmas exhibitions. Several exhibition projects were under way: 'The Paris Commune and Religion', 'Religious Obscurantism

on the Shores of Svetloyar Lake', 'Religious False Agronomy and Our Fight for Crops', 'In the Struggle for the Successful Outcome of the Five-Year Plan'. Moveable exhibitions were prepared for Moscow parks, collective farms, workers' and Red Army clubs: 'Religion and the Military', 'Religion and Women', 'Religion and the Events in China', 'Religion and Medicine (Against Priests and Easter)', 'Fake Miracles of Religion and Miracles of Science and Technology', 'Religion and School' (Archive 14, 9-10).

A well-developed multidimensional exhibition work was impossible without research and scholarly work that would support it. Indeed, the 1932 Action Plan demonstrates that the latter was planned to pursue several areas: (1) the history of religion and atheism (including the history of the struggle of religion against science, the study of social roots of religion, 'anti-god movement', counter-revolutionary activities of religious organizations, the history of Strastnoi, Novodevichyi, and Donskoi Monasteries in Moscow), (2) museum studies (examining the experience of the largest museums in Moscow, Leningrad and other cities as well as the existing anti-religious exhibitions and displays, exploring the issues of structuring museum exhibitions and labelling), (3) short- and long-term field trips to collect data and items in Belorussia (Judaism, Catholicism, everyday Orthodoxy, counter-revolutionary activities of the clergy), Ukraine (October Revolution, Civil War, counter-revolutionary activities of religious organizations, Judaism, Catholicism, and everyday Orthodoxy), Buryatia and Mongolia (Buddhism-Lamaism), the Volga Region and the Caucasus (Islam, Protestantism, and sects), Siberia (Shamanism, the Kolchak Movement), and the North (Archive 14, 7-8). It was planned that the obtained results would be presented as research talks and papers in the Office for the History of Religion at the Communist Academy and other research institutions.

Yet one important area for the CAM was to expand and deepen research and methodological work (Archive 14, 11). With that regard, there were several objectives. The first was to prepare and re-train anti-religious experts (museum experts and the so-called 'anti-god core

personnel', i.e. volunteers from the LMA). For this purpose, in 1932, a research and methodology office was supposed to open, anti-religious propaganda counselling sessions were to be introduced, and anti-religious exhibition corners and rooms were to be open outside the museum. Every year, the museum held several training programs for tour guides, which were attended by the CAM staff, Intourist guides, members of the Moscow Department for the People's Education, and 'the anti-god core personnel'. The latter were students of anti-religious workers' universities run by the LMA to prepare Communist anti-religious activists. They were discharged from work and received a scholarship. The tour guide program encompassed lectures, discussions and practical classes with museum staff and covered a wide array of topics from the history of religion to anti-religious propaganda and guiding tours.

Another important objective of the Museum's research and methodology work was to aid regional museums in their anti-religious work. This involved building networks and sharing experience with other museums, general guidance and supervision of anti-religious work in the country's museums, preparation for the All-Union Conference of Anti-Religious Museums and Departments, developing plans for provincial anti-religious museums and departments, and opening CAM branches. We have already mentioned that one of the research topics pursued by the Museum staff was the history of Novodevichyi and Donskoi Monasteries in Moscow. The choice of the topic was not accidental. The anti-religious museums in the former Trinity Sergius Lavra, Donskoi and Novodevichyi Monasteries were intended to become branches of the CAM (Archive 14, 11-12). According to the Action Plan, the former space was to be devoted to the topic of 'Monasteries at the Service of the Exploiting Classes of the Russian Feudal and Capitalist Society. The second of the three was to house 'Art at the Service of Religion and Anti-God Movement', while the latter was to accommodate an exhibition on 'Woman and Family in Pre-Revolutionary Times and in the Soviet Times'.

Popular engagement of museum visitors included a monthly bulletin board, short lecture and discussion sessions, a puppet show, anti-religious

quizzes and book exhibitions. On Tverskoy Boulevard, there was 'an anti-religious kiosk'.

In early 1933, CAM's exhibition underwent a careful review by the Moscow Control Committee of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, a Communist party organization for state control. The review resulted in a report addressed to the Chairman of the Central Council of the LMA, E. Yaroslavsky, which demonstrates that the museum's work was deemed unsatisfactory in many ways (Archive 16). For example, the report mentioned that the CAM was "greatly behind in reflecting the current economic and political campaigns". Some sections "required a complete overhaul". Only one section was devoted to "ethnic religions" ('Islam'). The construction of the section on Judaism had not been finished. The sections of Buddhism-Lamaism and Shamanism had not been created, although "the collections for those sections had already been selected and partly processed by researchers". The review of the exhibitions that had begun in 1932 kept being stalled.

According to the Committee, the main reason behind this unsatisfactory state of things was the lack of the required funding. The report said:

"It has to be recognized that, up until the present time, the Museum's budget has been accidental and poorly defined. Therefore, specific issues to be researched and processed were not pushed forward...This state of things at the Museum, which claims to play a leading and guiding role, needs to undergo a drastic change in the future. CAM needs to become a research and methodology base for anti-religious propaganda. CAM has taken this road both in terms of exhibitions and work with the general audience."

Along with the flaws, the committee pointed out the Museum's successes. Those were the work of the general audience section aimed at increasing the number of visitors and improving visitor service. This was mainly achieved through strengthening networks with factories, schools, LMA organizations, tour bases. Thus, in 1932, the Museum's permanent display and exhibitions were seen by 115000 visitors. Approximately



100000 were reached out to in boulevards, public squares, and kolkhoz markets.

This report also tells us on the museum's main funding sources. CAM's budget for 1932 comprised state funding from the Central Executive Committee of the USSR (140000 roubles), the Central Council of the LMA as a public organization (23500 roubles), and the Museum's own income (27000 roubles), which totalled at 190500 roubles. The author of report, who remains unknown, pointed out that the budget was 'miserable' and had "constantly narrowed the work of the Museum". The budget for 1933 accounted for the planned overhaul of the display and provided for increasing the costs up to 359254 roubles. The income still consisted mainly of the planned state funding of 140000 roubles and the Museum's own income: 34 700 roubles earned from serving museum visitors, 54000 roubles earned from public moveable exhibitions (1200 pcs.) and 1200 roubles earned from panoramas and an astronomy station. This resulted in a deficit of 129254 roubles. The report noted that "without this missing amount, the plan for 1933 immediately becomes endangered, for the funding base for the planned events has not been provided". The only potential funding source that could provide the missing funds was the LMA, according to the report's conclusion: "Taking the above into account, it is necessary to resolve the funding situation at the CAM so that the planned budget is covered by the Central Council of the LMA or other organization able to provide the missing part of the CAM's budget." However, the discussion of the LMA's budget for 1933 failed to resolve the issue of funding the CMA. The League's funds mainly came from membership fees and the sales of its publications and were also severely lacking. E. Yaroslavsky's resolution on the document ordered F. N. Oleshchuk, the Deputy Chairman of the LMA, to "process the issue to present it to the People's Commissariat for Education".

Despite its financial difficulties, the Museum kept developing. In the summer of 1933, it took part in an intermuseum project: the creation and operation of the Natural Sciences Pavilion in the Science and Technology Town in the Gorky Central Culture and Recreation Park. It was operated

by four staff members who held university degrees in science and were experienced in political education. They were helped by volunteers from the “anti-god core personnel”, who helped register visitors, take care of the animals and aquariums, guard the display, act as tour guides if need be, and accompany moveable exhibitions.

Along with the CAM, the pavilion was created by the Timiryazev Biology Museum, the MSU Anthropology Museum, the Planetarium, the Darwin Museum, the Brain Institute Museum, the Zoo, and the Oblast Atheist Council. All museums provided display items, counselling and assistance to the pavilion’s staff. The goal of the pavilion was “to provide the working visitor with clear and accessible science material that would be most efficient in unmasking religious statements and impose Dialectical Materialist world-view [and] arm the general masses of the working visitors with scientific knowledge needed for the fight for Socialism” (Archive 21, 53).

The exhibition labels mostly contained selected quotes from Darwin, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. The structure of the pavilion encompassed the following sections: Astronomy, The Evolution of the Animal World, Anthropology, Anti-Religious Section, the History of Natural Sciences. The visitors found the following display items of great interest: coloured slides with images of celestial bodies in the Astronomy section, stuffed animals and live specimens demonstrating the variability of animals and plants in the Evolution section, models and tables demonstrating atavistic phenomena in the Anthropology section, the icon of St. Christopher in the Anti-Religious Section. There was a separate table where visitors could use a magnifying glass and a microscope. Guided tours covered the following topics: Science and Religion on Life and Death, The Origin of the Earth and the Universe, The Evolution of the Animal World, The Principles of Darwinism, The History of Natural Sciences, The Struggle Against Religion. Some outcomes of the First Five-Year Plan found their way to the exhibition: achievements in genetics and endocrinology as well as the increase in ‘anti-god work’, i.e. overcoming religion.

If the surviving visitor reviews are to be believed, it was probably this experience of a very successful intermuseum project that encouraged the CAM to start working on a new section of its permanent display, 'Science and Religion'. It was supposed to replace the existing section on 'The Dialectics of Nature'. On February 19, 1934, the research meeting of the Museum approved the theme and display plan for the new section that had been developed by the section head, Yu. Ya. Kogan. The new department was aimed at "using the foundations of dialectical materialism behind natural sciences and the contemporary achievements of scientific thought on the matter" in order to demonstrate the irreconcilable relationship between science and religion. To do this, it was planned to "provide visitors with fully featured museum material, remove photos from the exhibition, if possible, to draw the visitors' attention to specific boards and items by introducing an array of new technological achievements of museum display, to provide a lone visitor with an opportunity to explore the issues presented by the exhibition in a more profound and detailed fashion" (Archive 21, 47)

The new department opened on October 15. The analytical note presenting the results of this work described it as the first experience "of this scope and dimension" for the USSR museums (Archive 21, 50).

Compared to 'The Dialectics of Nature' section, 'Science and Religion' did not only have more items on display (287 instead of the 123 in the older museum section), but also "acquired several additional show boards: meteorology, agriculture, medicine, and 'Society' board" (Archive 21, 49). The exhibition employed new display methods: optical models, model switched by use of a lift, a slide rotator, a turntable, slides moved mechanically, lighting effects, and a gramophone. At the entrance to the department, there were "book showcases with science and technology news", a board entitled *Science Calendar*, and a 'visitor's corner', i.e. a table with stationery and current issues of popular science magazines (Archive 21, 49). At the end of the exhibition, there was a question and answer board, where one could find a list of references. All items had extensive labelling in Russian and in English.

In 1934, another event took place and proved to be very significant for the life of the CAM. The Council of People's Commissars proclaimed it a Research Institution of All-Union Significance. The recommendation to take this issue to the Research Committee of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR can be found in the above-mentioned report containing audit results from the Moscow Control Committee of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection. The new status led to changes in the scope of work in research and methodology, and the CAM transitioned into a country-wide methodological centre. Now, the Museum was working towards the goal of "summarizing the material on the work of provincial museums, developing a range of guidelines on methods, methodology, and techniques for anti-religious museum work", "organizing research work to develop collections and prepare materials as well as to lay the ground for publishing serious research works by the CAM".

The scope of the Museum's assistance to local museums provided in 1934 is, indeed, impressive. Mainly, the assistance covered three major areas: (1) instruction and counselling provided to research staff visiting the museum, (2) guidelines development, and (3) field trips to local museums, where the CAM's staff helped develop theme and exhibition plans for anti-religious sections and exhibitions both in anti-religious museums and in local history museums. In 1934, three staff members went on twenty-one field trips. They visited anti-religious museums preparing to be opened in Ulan-Ude, Irkutsk, Cheboksary, Krasnodar and local history museums in Kyakhta, Kiev, Novosibirsk, Petropavlovsk, Omsk, Sverdlovsk, Izhevsk, Kineshma, Kostroma, Rostov-Yaroslavsky, Novocheboksarsk, Rostov-on-Don, Dnepropetrovsk, Samara, Voronezh, Gorky, Kursk (Archive 21, 6-10).

For instance, in October 1934, N. Pupyshv, a young museum researcher, went to Tyumen to audit and consult the local Anti-Religious Museum. During his visit, he found that the museum did not have premises of its own, as the church where it had been previously located was blown up to produce rock stone. All museum items had been moved to the Local History Museum, where one room was allocated to the

anti-religious section. The secretary of the local League of Militant Atheists branch, Shemilina, was in charge of organizing it. According to N. A. Pupyshev, “she was new not only to museum work, but also to anti-god activism, a person absolutely unprepared for organizing not only the section, but even an anti-religious exhibition” (Archive 197, 1). Having examined the existing items and premises, the researcher concluded that, at the time, it was impossible to create an anti-religious section at the museum. The researcher suggested that the administration of the Local History Museum “allocate a qualified comrade for museum work”, “take care of the budget”, “in the natural sciences section, show the origins of religion by reorganizing the existing display items and adding new ones” (Archive 197, 2). To facilitate the task for the local staff, he drew up the plan to restructure the section himself and provided the appropriate methodological guidelines.

Two years later, N. Pupyshev visited the Anti-Religious Museum in Ulan-Ude, where he drew up the project of the Buddhism-Lamaism Museum. The project is dated to September 1936 and opens with, “Due to extensive collection work on Lamaism, the Oblast Anti-Religious Museum in Ulan-Ude founded in May 1934 is, at present, the only centre in the USSR where the main monuments of one of the four world religions are concentrated” (Archive 39, 1). According to the author, this led to “the main goal of the Anti-Religious Museum in Ulan-Ude [which was] to avoid spreading itself thin in collection and exhibition work [and] start creating a systematic collection on Buddhism-Lamaism and related religions, with the main task of building a museum devoted to the history of Buddhism-Lamaism in mind” (Archive 39, 1).

An example of work on preparing guidelines can be found in the outline of an oral talk by another young researcher, Mark Persits, that has been preserved in the Museum’s archives. Like many other Moscow-based religion historians of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, he began his career in this Museum. The title of the talk was “On the Methodology of Structuring the Display on Orthodoxy in Anti-Religious Museums and Anti-Religious Sections of Local History Museums” (Archive 10). Persits pointed

out that “a great number of the existing anti-religious museums base their display on Orthodox materials, which makes it especially relevant to determine the right approach to the structure of the display unmasking the class-based exploitative role of the Orthodox church”. He insisted that “the themes of the displays on Orthodoxy should not be the same throughout all museums”. “The scope and the nature of the topics have to be altered depending on the specific characteristics of the museum creating the department... In all cases, the main place in anti-religious museums and respective local history museums should be allocated to local material. Forgetting this principle leads to a display overflowing with non-museum material such as photos etc.” In the spirit of the ideological and political disputes raised by the concept of history suggested by M. N. Pokrovsky in the Soviet science of the 1930s, Persits wrote:

“Museum practice has suffered greatly from the anti-historic concept by Pokrovsky. In a great majority of cases, museum displays have been reflecting not the specific history, but rather the sociological scheme. This deprived museums of the opportunity to involve authentic historic material and made them dry and pale. In accordance with a general turn on the historical front, museums must build all their displays and those devoted to Orthodoxy, in particular, on the basis of the historical principle. This principle does not preclude, but even pre-determines the introduction of separated complexes of topics that allow us to use the method of comparing specific items and help present and unmask the given aspects of the Orthodox church activities more vividly. However, these complexes of topics should not be chosen randomly. Such a complex theme may only include the elements of the whole history display that, in their nature, are common for a given stretch of time. For instance, there is no need to show the everyday life and income of the clergy during Capitalism over and over again. It is much better to organize a complex display on the topic so that it would present material characterizing the income and life of the clergy during the whole historic period in question. Where this topic has to be located in terms of chronology is up to each museum and its capacity.”

The scope of the display devoted to the history of the Orthodox church for central museums, among which Persits listed the State Museum of the History of Religion in Leningrad, the Central Anti-Religious Museum, the Anti-Religious Museum in Kiev, needed to be predetermined by the curriculum in the history of the people's of the USSR taught at universities. At the same time, he emphasized that the display on Orthodoxy would be truly anti-religious only if it was demonstrated alongside the development of atheism. Persits claimed that "until recently, anti-religious museums had omitted that most important topic" and, for that reason, the experience in structuring displays like that was extremely insufficient.

The above-mentioned decision of the Council of People's Commissars from 1934 proclaimed the CAM as a research institution of all-union significance and emphasized not only its methodological work in anti-religious propaganda, but also its research, which was supposed to contribute to the development of collections and publications. Indeed, in the fall of the same year, the Museum launched a research group on religious beliefs of the peoples of the USSR. It was a Moscow-based branch of the Leningrad-based Section for the Study of Religious Beliefs of the Peoples of the USSR headed by Nikolay Matorin. The section in Leningrad conducted field work that led to the development of the so-called religious maps of various regions and explored religious syncretism. The report on the Museum's work in 1934 shows that the Moscow research group held five meetings, where the following topics were discussed: (1) the cult of springs in the Kaluga Region, (2) the cult of St. Nicholas in relation to hemp cultivation, (3) the cult of water and trees in the Taldom District of the Moscow Region, (4) everyday Orthodoxy in the north of the Moscow Region, (5) religious beliefs of the Western Circassians (Kogan 1934). The desire to systematize the results of this field work probably led to the development of the *Approximate Program for the Study of Religious Relics and Abandonment of Religion by the Masses* in 1936 (Archive 122). Its conclusion noted "extreme difficulty of the process of abandonment of religion by the masses", "the multitude of ways of abandonment", and "diverse

degrees of preserved religious feeling”, which made it impossible to use “the simplified method of dividing people into believers and non-believers”.

By the end of the 1930s, the Museum boasted a team of researchers that the Museum’s founder, B. Kandidov, had dreamt about. Among them, there were both very experienced Soviet religion scholars and young beginners: M. Sheinman, N. Pupyshev, G. Snesarev, A. Ranovich, V. Rozhnitsin, S. Tokarev, V. Shokhor, I. Kryvelev, A. Pint, M. Persits, B. Sharevskaya. The collections were actively expanded through museum exchange, purchases from private owners, commissions to artists and sculptors, and acquisitions from religious institutions subject to closure. Research and collection trips to remote areas of the country such as Buryatia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia were an important source of collection expansion.

For example, in 1936, Nikolay Pupyshev, an expert on Buddhism, undertook a collection expedition to the Agin Aimag in Buryat-Mongolia. The purpose of the trip was to visit the previously closed Tsugolsky Datsan and ship Buddhist objects to the Moscow museum as the lack for this type of collection items was acutely felt due to the unfinished objective to create a display on Buddhism.

N. A. Pupyshev’s trip to the Agin Aimag in Buryat-Mongolia was reflected in the CAM’s inventory documentation as well as in Pupyshev’s articles: *The Concept of the Sukhavati Heaven in Buddhism (Based on the Materials from the Collections of the Central Anti-Religious Museum)* (Archive 184) and *A Review of the Display of the Buddhism-Lamaism Section of the Central Anti-Religious Museum* (Archive 273).

In his article on the Sukhavati heaven, Pupyshev summarized the results of his trip in 1936 and noted that “the Central Anti-Religious Museum received from the datsan not all of the religious complexes, but a large part of them. Despite this remark, their scope is very impressive and amounts to 3 train cars, or 5000 separate items” (Archive 184, 2). We may suggest that what is meant here is the number of train cars and items that the researcher had sent from Buryatia to Moscow. However,



according to N. A. Pupyshv himself, “during transfer, part of the heaven was lost” (Archive 184, 18). Therefore, fewer museum items were actually delivered to Moscow. However, their number was so great that a separate inventory book was devoted to registration of the Buryat shipment. This was the only case when this was done at the CAM. The book includes 199 sheets and 858 titles of single and complex items. As the collector wrote, most of them were dated to the nineteenth or early twentieth century and had been made locally. However, the true value of the Tsugol collection was not measured in quantity, but rather by “the fact that, in most cases, it represented whole religious and artistic complexes” (Archive 184, 2). According to Pupyshv, “this shipment made the Lamaism collection the top one among the items available in the CAM” (Archive 184, 1). In terms of museum display, the most interesting objects were the enormous statue of Buddha Maitreya, more than 7 metres high, that used to be located in Maidari-sume and was delivered in a disassembled state; “the Buddhist heaven of more than 64 cubic metres”, a processional elephant with a blanket decorated with gems and a carriage for the statue of Maidari, “the Ganjur library: one hundred and ten volumes in silk wrappings stored in two wooden cases”, 385 statues from the ‘1000 Lamas’ series, a felt yurt, and many others. The expedition resulted in the creation of a permanent exhibition entitled *Buddhism-Lamaism* at the CAM.

Pupyshv’s article on the Sukhavati heaven in Buddhism was supposed to appear in the first issue of *The Works of the CAM*. The work on the publication began in 1940. The almanac was going to have three sections: (1) research on the history of religion and atheism, (2) materials (collection and documents), (3) expeditions and field trips (Archive 186). The first section was to contain the following articles: *The Role of Religion in the Emerging Class Society (Based on the Jagga Materials)* by B. Sharevskaya, *On the Origins of Shamanism* by S. Tokarev, *On the Social Roots of Sorcery* by A. Lavrov, *Roman Inquisition in the 16th Century* by V. Rozhitsin, *Orthodox Church and the Mongol Yoke* by L. Lazarevich, *The Atheism of Spinoza* by M. Persits, *The Atheism of Holbach* by V. Shokhor, *Marx and Engels on*

*the Separation of the Church from the State and the Freedom of Conscience* by Kh. Momdjian. The second section was to contain the following articles: *The Commemoration Books of the Solovki Monastery* by G. Georgievsky, *The Buddhist Heaven of Sukavadi* by N. Pupyshev, *The Church at the Service of the Monarchy* by V. Aleksandri, *Amulets of the Eastern Caucasus* by E. Shilling, *Bolshevik Anti-Religious Leaflets Preserved at the CAM* by G. Zaitsev. The third section was to present the results of G. Snesev's expedition to Central Asia and A. Lavrov's and B. Vampilov's field trip to the Egoryev District of the Moscow Region. All articles were written by museum staff or Moscow-based scholars of religion invited to perform specific museum tasks. The materials were characterized by scope of topics and locations. Unfortunately, the Great Patriotic War precluded the book from publication, but many of the articles sent were preserved in the archives of our museum and published in the recent years.

At the same time, the work on *A Brief Atheist Dictionary* began. The Museum order dated to March 23, 1941 described the creation of a working group comprised of the museum's leading researchers: V. Aleksandri, B. Vampilov, G. Zaitsev, A. Lavrov, L. Lazarevich, M. Kuznetsov, Kh. Momdjian, M. Persits, A. Pint, N. Pupyshev, V. Rozhitsin, G. Snesev, S. Tokarev, I. Sharevskaya, V. Shokhor. The editorial commission was also formed and headed by the Museum's director S. A. Kuzmin (Archive 182). For general guidance, each author was assigned an editor, who was responsible for accepting "only high-quality literary material". The topics of the origins of religion, religions of the Ancient World, Buddhism-Lamaism and Islam were curated by S. Tokarev. V. Rozhitsin was in charge of Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, the Church of England. M. Persits curated the topics of Orthodoxy, sects and Judaism, and Kh. Momdjian was in charge of atheism and the French Materialism. The draft of the word list sent to the State Publishing House for Political Literature contained more than 1200 terms and names related to the following dictionary sections: names of religions, belief systems, sects, religious movements (Christianity, Islam, the Dukhobors, Baptists etc.); concepts from the history of religion: totemism, fetishism, magic etc.;

‘words from religious usage’: God, Spirit, God Incarnate, Judgement Day etc; concepts related to the church structure: bishop, presbyter, priest, abbot etc; names of religious objects: see, altar, chalice, banner; names of the greatest church leaders, religious authors etc.: Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Nikon, Rasputin; the main philosophical terms related to religion and criticism thereof: matter, indeterminism, agnosticism, necessity; scientific concepts related to the criticism of religion: life, Darwinism, evolutionary theory; names of the greatest atheist leaders, freethinkers, enemies of religion and church: Democritus, Bruno, Spinoza, Voltaire, Feuerbach etc., as well as of classical authors of Marxism-Leninism (Archive 182, 5-6). The distribution and amount of text was to be predetermined by the significance of the terms. Some were supposed to be accompanied by ‘principal articles’, for example, Atheism, Religion, Freedom of Conscience, Lenin on Religion, while others were to be followed by a brief factual note (St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, Inquisition, Iconoclasm, Old Believers, etc.). Yet others deserved only an explanation or a reference to other articles (Stole, Priest, Chandelier, the Old Testament, etc.). The dictionary articles were to be written and submitted as soon as possible, by May 15. However, the archives contain no results of the project run by this research group. The work on this publication was also cut short by the beginning of the war.

All of the above-mentioned facts demonstrate that, in the second half of the 1930s, the CAM was gradually developing and turning from an institution of propaganda and atheism into a research centre on religion and atheism. These changes led to a change of the name: on February 20, 1942, the Praesidium of the League of Militant Atheists renamed the museum into the Central Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism. According to the documents of the time, ‘the new name was a result of all the vast amount of work on collecting, research, and display, and not just a change of the sign on the door’ (Archive 32). The Museum began active work on reinterpreting its specialization. The surviving versions of this document show that “a prospective objective of the CAM was to show the history of religion and atheism throughout the history of human

society” (Archive 24). Meeting this objective was seen as directly dependent on “obtaining sufficient authentic material objects and documents related to the history of all world religions”, “employing additional highly qualified experts in the history of religion and atheism”, and “complete Marxist and scientific development of all issues related to the general history of religion and atheism”.

The change of a name, in its turn, led to a change of the governing authority: in 1945, V. M. Molotov signed the decision of the Council of People’s Commissars to transfer the Museum from under the auspices of the League of Militant Atheists to the Academy of Sciences. The whole Museum collection was handed over to the Academy of Sciences and the Central Museum of the History of Religion was established in Moscow under its auspices. And on March 20, 1947, another decision was made. This time it was issued by the Praesidium of the Academy of Sciences: to liquidate the Museum of the History of Religion in Moscow and transfer its collections to the State Museum of the History of Religion in Leningrad.

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## **“I KNEW ABOUT GOD, BUT I DIDN’T KNOW THAT I’M A BELIEVER”: NARRATIVES ABOUT COMING TO BELIEF IN AN ATHEIST COUNTRY**

*The article describes the spiritual quest of evangelical Christians during the Soviet period. The published memoirs and biographical interviews of the believers, who had an experience of religious life during the Soviet period, are the sources for the analysis. Important factors, which enabled the spiritual quest, are emphasized: the extreme life conditions, inner crisis; familiarizing with believers; the problem of choice between denominations; conflict with the external environment; the feeling of Divine influence.*

*Keywords: religion in the Soviet Union, religious community, Protestants, Baptists, Pentecostals, spiritual quest*

*“I sat down there at the last row and listened.  
I thought ‘Wow! What’s going on! Scientists’ opinion about God.  
I know these scientists; I studied well at school...  
Scientists are so clever, they penetrate the creation, investigate it  
and they see the traces of the Creator, but I don’t know God!”*

(Interview of Y. Chislina)

### **Introduction**

The reasons for the ‘vitality’ and even increase in the number of followers of later Protestant denominations in the post-war USSR, the specific features of their psychology and worldview have often drawn

attention of Soviet scholars of religion. They have tried to understand the phenomenon of people who grew up in the socialist society and became members of religious 'sects' (cult).

*A sect is not only a religious organization, but it is a kind of society. People are accepted into it and excluded from it. The members of a sect preach religion not like the Catholics or Orthodox do; their whole activity is built upon studying the Bible and interpreting it according to our conditions. Therefore a member of a cult believes and has a 'religious psychology' not because of his attachment to the tradition but because his faith is hammered into his brain – he believes with the brain, and this is slightly different (Belyakova 2019, 141).*

In this way, the deputy president of the Council for Religious Affairs of the Cabinet of Ministers of the USSR Petr Makartsev explained to his Lithuanian colleagues the peculiarity of later Protestants in February 1977. The Soviet researchers suggested a few, sometimes contradictory, conceptions, according to which the anti-religious work should be conducted. First of all, the ordinary believers were 'drawn into sects' as a result of being confused and manipulated by the mercenary leaders of communities. This is why the efforts of the Soviet power in the 1960-1980s were aimed predominantly at the fight with the 'sectarian leaders'. Attempts to exposing their mercenary motives to the ordinary believers were also found in the Soviet press. Secondly, the acceptance of a religious worldview was explained by insufficient education. Therefore, the intensification of atheist education was needed. Thirdly, the researchers noted that religion often became consolation for the people who experienced hardship so typical in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Levada 1965; Bondarenko & Kosyanchuk et al. 1971; Pismannik 1984; Dobson 2015). Fourthly, the significance of the social-regulative functions performed by a religious community was noted (e.g. Bondarenko & Kosyanchuk et al. 1988). However, due to the initial hostile-negative attitude to religious institutions in general and later Protestant denominations in particular, the research of Soviet scholars of religion was part of the harsh fight of the Soviet ideological system with religion and '*religiozniki*' for the souls and minds of

the population. The dramatic character of this fight was aggravated by the fact that the state used the most severe forms in its fight for the young generation, adolescents.

## Materials and methods

We think that it is important to give special attention to the spiritual quests of the Soviet citizens, future evangelical believers (representatives of later Protestant denominations in Russia traditionally call themselves evangelical believers, i.e. the people whose life is built upon the Gospel). It was this quest, which led to the choice of the evangelical faith. The result of this choice also had clear social consequences. The article is devoted to the diversity of their spiritual quests.

We should clarify that a person could not become an evangelical Christian without any spiritual quest, a conscious choice was necessary. According to the doctrine, the starting point for becoming a Christian is an individual repentance of a person for life without God and the following baptism in the conscious age. We understand spiritual quest as a search for one's 'own' Church. It included familiarizing and communicating with believers and a conscious choice of a certain denomination.

We use biographical interviews and published memoirs of people who became believers during the Soviet period as the source for our analysis. The biographical interviews were collected in the towns of Russia: Tambov, Krasnodar, Maloyaroslavets and different towns of Tyumen region (Tyumen, Zavodoukovsk, Nizhnevartovsk, Ishim); Kazakhstan (Petropavlovsk); and Ukraine (Chernovtsy, Kramatorsk). The subject of spiritual quest was an important element and a starting point for the interviews. We addressed Baptists and Pentecostals who became believers during the Soviet period. There are children of believers as well as first-generation believers among our informants.

The specific feature of the analyzed material can be attributed to the voice of only those people who consciously chose the 'gospel faith' and not the motives of the people who rejected it. It is also important that the



process of a personal unique way to God, when a person is often considered to be an instrument in the hands of God, is seen as a necessary element in a person's story about himself/herself and his/her awareness of himself/herself in the church. The person is an active participant in the spiritual quest and an object of the impact of the will of God at the same time. In charismatic communities (where the practice of receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit is used) the intensity of direct communication with the Divine determines the rank of the communicant to a great extent.

Thus, the topic of the spiritual quest, or the choice of faith and religious institution, is significant for the subjects of the research, as well as for the researchers. The narratives available for the researcher usually originate from the people who have experience of public talk on the matters of the salvation of the soul, i.e. preachers, deacons and presbyters.

Usually they have a few hundred vivid didactic stories and images, often taken from their personal experience. They necessarily use the narrative material accumulated over the years for their autobiographical interviews and for writing memoirs. Analyzing this material, we understand that it is not a live, direct memory, but a stable auto-biographical legend which took on a rigid finalized form in the course of years, in which the story of the spiritual quest leading to joining an evangelical community plays a key role (e.g. Belyakova & Kliueva 2018; Folieva 2020). However, for the purposes of our research, this fact does not seem not to be an obstacle, since we have an opportunity to identify a constant, 'dogmatic', in other words 'framework', component of the narratives, into which the believer inscribes his/her personal experience.

## Results

We have identified a few factors that influence a successful ending of the spiritual quest: (1) the extremity of the circumstances in which a future believer finds himself/herself; (2) inner crisis; (3) familiarizing with the community and the believers; (4) the problem of choice between

different denominations; conflict with the external environment; (5) the perception of the Divine influence.<sup>1</sup>

Let us consider each of these factors.

The extremity of the circumstances in which a future believer  
finds himself/herself

For a long time, the most common hypothesis was that many people are drawn to faith during extreme circumstances. These circumstances may be external (warfare or repressions) or internal (the illnesses of the person himself/herself or his relatives in the first place). The impact of the external extreme circumstances and the spiritual quest, which followed, are especially characteristic for the believers of the older generation or their parents, in particular during World War II. One of the characteristic motives is the following:

*Because of the hardships of the wartime, people were drawn to God with a special force... being an adolescent at that time I started to sing in the choir and even to preach sometimes. I accepted the holy water baptism in August 1943 literally under the cannonade rumbling when the red army was approaching (Prokhorov 2010, 169).*

We will not analyze this hypothesis in detail, because it is included in the concept of "religious revival", generally accepted in historiography (e.g. Sawatsky 1981; Savinskii 1999; Huhn 2014; Beliakova 2020). We can give an example of a story of an adolescent, who later became an evangelical believer. During World War II, the narrator lived in the village of Lipno, Leningrad region. He remembered:

*When Germans bombed the town of Bologoe which is situated near us, my co-villagers were seized with panic, they all were afraid for their fathers, husbands and sons, mobilized in the front. In search of*

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<sup>1</sup> A similar typology, in a more concise form, was developed on the materials of modern Pentecostal churches (see details in Poplavsky & Klyueva 2017; Vagramenko 2018). C. Wanner offers his own approach to understanding conversion (Wanner 2007, 148-170).

*consolation, two neighbors once approached me with a request to read the Bible for them. Their husbands were sent to the front. One of them had already been killed. The women had found the Bible somewhere, but they could not read, therefore they came to me. Someone told them that it was indicated in the Bible when the war should end. I was eager to agree to read the Bible to them, for I had heard of the existence of such Divine book. The women came to listen to it only in the evenings. But I spent 18 hours a day with that book... (Antonov 2010, 25-26).*

The extreme character of the situation often triggered a radical change of values and for the acquiring of faith.

#### Inner crisis of the narrator

The inner crisis of the narrator is often not verbalized as a ‘crisis’, but is expressed as ‘wandering without a goal’, ‘inner unsettledness’, ‘search for a meaning’. In some cases, people characterized their feeling as “emptiness”, “existence without a goal”, “suicidal thoughts” (Poplavskiy & Kliueva 2013, 37). One of the believers described his state before the conversion with the following words:

*One Saturday... I had some kind of apathy in the evening. Friends came: it's Saturday, let's go to a restaurant. I said: "I won't go". I did not want to read or do anything. I thought I would have a walk around the town. I went out and started to walk without a goal, like this, in one direction, then in the other, without any purpose (interview with V. Vityuk).*

The feeling of inner crisis is inherent to all people, including children that have grown up in religious environment. For such children, the crisis could manifest itself in ‘God-fighting’ quests or just in feelings of uncertainty about the existence of God.

*Once I started to think I felt that God did not exist. It immediately seemed to me that I live in a dim world, the sky was switched off for me immediately. But a few minutes later I thought: no, it cannot be like this! God exists! And the world started to play with all the colors (interview with V. Tsukov).*

For the children of religious families the overcoming of the inner crisis led to the process of repentance, i.e., conscious acceptance of God. It brought orderliness and harmony into life:

*And I knew that if I did everything right, then everything was good. And when something was wrong, it was as if a kind of darkness came. I searched /for God/. Everything became restored (interview with P. Mochalkin).*

It is important to note that the negative characteristics of their life, including the stories about bad habits, dissatisfaction with the current life and a vague wish to change it before coming to believe in God is characteristic for most testimonies of people who became believers in adulthood. Such a beginning of a story largely helps the narrator to show his listeners the opposition: 'life before God' and 'life with God'. In cases of children from religious families, the opposition between the conscious and the latent religious faith is presented in the stories.

#### Familiarizing with the community and believers

For many people who converted in adulthood, interpersonal relations in the community played a decisive role for the decision in favor of a certain faith. Soviet anti-religious propaganda and the established negative image of a 'sects' member were discarded after familiarizing with the life of believers.

One of the believers, who was born in 1924 and was a member of the Communist Union of Youth at the beginning of the War in 1941, as well as a member of the Union of Militant Atheists, describes the spiritual quest of the village youth and his first impression from the encounter with the believers in detail:

*Initially we tried to follow the way of science; we read lectures for our co-villagers in the club. We tried to teach people to respect each other, not to do evil, not to swear, not to fight, not to drink alcohol excessively, to live in peace, to be compassionate to each other, to help each other in difficult situations. It was meant to achieve happiness and some goal in*

*life. But unfortunately we did not see the desired fruits from our lectures. And then suddenly some half-literate Pyotr managed to capture the attention of these criminal people, whom we thought impossible to convince to leave their former way of life. And now it became a reality that they repented before all those present and started to live honestly, respecting their neighbors and serving them (Gula 2005, 12).*

A young Pentecostal from Petropavlovsk also mentions the visible changes in a man after joining the religious community:

*I did not consider myself to be a believer. And then I moved here into this town. I was very surprised when my brother converted. He stopped shouting and swearing, i.e. he expressed obedience. I thought – how could they influence him like this? I thought I should go and find out (interview with A. Koch).*

A religious community acted as a place where people detached from their habitual environment could find a place of their own. Andrey Koch, who made his choice in favor of faith in 1980, remembered that

*I thought that there were only older people, children, cowards, some kind of underdeveloped people... Then I came to the town, started to go to the divine services at the community of Pentecostals; it took some time before I found some good friends... I started to go – once, three times, then the tenth time and then I see – people seem normal, they can be my friends. And then I got used to it, basically (interview with A. Koch).*

A religious community, even during the Soviet years, could be experienced as a 'protected' or 'safe' space. A young girl, having come to Voronezh in 1947 started to look for believers on the advice of her father.

*When I was at the meeting for the first time, I was impressed by such love among them, by their happy faces, how they greet each other; I was struck by that. I looked around and did not know whom I should address, and then one elderly sister asked: "Whom are you looking for?" I said: "I need..." – "Go to the brothers (interview with Y. Chislina).*

On the very first day the girl was invited to participate in a youth meeting, where she was surprised and convinced by the sermon on the

opinion of scientists about God. Afterwards she remained in the community of Baptists for her whole life.

The published narratives and quotations are notable in so far as they show the pattern of institutionalization of the spiritual quest of individual people: through entering into contact with believers in everyday life. It was the most common form of attracting a person into a community: having noticed an interested person, believers started to communicate with him/her and preach to him/her (Belyakova 2012). The friendliness of relations in an evangelical community (often opposed to the relations in a secular society), especially for people, thrown out of a habitual pattern of life, is often mentioned in the narratives of the believers of the post-war generation.

Trust and attention to newcomers attracted those who could be marginal and outcasts in the external environment. A former prisoner who was released from a concentration camp in Vorkuta spoke about the support he received from the believers:

*While in the camp we had a connection with some believers in Vorkuta through one trusted brother (he went to work outside the prison without the convoy)... And now I am present at a Christian divine service for the first time in my life. Everything is new, unusual and awe-inspiring for me. The Vorkuta meeting of the people of God was supplemented by such an enthusiastic observer! A group (with about 60 members of the church in it) of the redeemed by Christ lived as one family! And I was a completely strange person, about whom they only had heard, - but I was accepted as a relative! I was surprised and touched to tears... I cried through the whole of the first meeting... (Boyko 2007, 32).*

The surrounding people noticed the honesty and trustfulness of believers in their everyday life. The Christian behavior in everyday life influenced the children who grew up in such families as well as the external environment: thus they received the confirmation of the values preached by the believers. A 15 years old girl who converted at the beginning of the 1980s, became friends with the children of a Baptist presbyter:

*We were like a part of their family. They cared for us and we practically almost lived with them. It was a unifying moment for us that we grew up there. We communicated a lot, we grew up there, we were very good friends. This joined us together (interview with G. Gaynullina).*

Perhaps it became one of the reasons why the girl remained a believer even under external pressure.

It is notable that the importance of social protection of the members of the community, mutual support and friendliness is mostly mentioned by female respondents, while the men mostly speak about their spiritual experiences. The childhood experience to a large extent influenced the choice of faith in the conscious age. However, it seems that labeling the children from the believers' environment and their estrangement from the external environment played a great role in their becoming aware of themselves as essentially different from the surrounding people and in them taking their own different way.

#### The problem of choice between denominations

Often the spiritual quest led to the problem of choice between two denominations, most often both Christian, between the Orthodox faith and Baptist or Pentecostal.

One of the narrators mentioned above who came from a family of believers, spoke about the conversion of his father:

*Not far from where we lived the sectarians started to gather. He [the father] considered himself to be Orthodox... It was after the war. He wore a cross and was maltreated by teachers and schoolmates, when he went to school. And thus he became zealous to disperse this cult, for his relatives had joined it. He went there with such a zeal to restore the truth of the Orthodox faith. But he did not manage to disperse it, the second time as well; he had to start reading the Bible to answer the questions of those people. And when he started reading the Bible, he became an evangelical Christian himself. After it he baptized his parents, our grandfather and grandmother. And after him my mom – his wife – also believed and we became a Christian family. It happened when he had already been married (interview with Y. Sipko).*

We should note that often the construction of a Protestant evangelical identity went through the conflict with the Orthodox environment, including the criticism of the clergy for their non-Christian actions. Many memoirs and interviews include a narrative about a direct contact with an Orthodox priest, which undermined the traditional religiosity of the respondent. "In my understanding a priest was a holy man, who served God and did good to the people. But one event changed that idea and shook the child's faith" (Antonov 2010, 5). A baptist Antonov speaks about the avarice of the village parish priest. However, we may assume that not only the criticism of the behavior of the Orthodox clergy, but also an attempt to justify one's departure from Orthodoxy form the basis for such accounts.

In general, the stories about non-Christian behavior of an Orthodox priest are characteristic for Protestant narratives. Superstition, idolatry, refusal to read and understand the Holy Scripture, lack of love towards their neighbors and avarice – this is the typical set of accusations coming from the evangelical environment towards the representatives of the Orthodox tradition. The following quotation is about the same:

*An Orthodox church was on my way to the place where they collected milk. After I handed the milk over and was passing by the church with empty buckets (we were three children from our barrack – two boys and me), we noticed a young Orthodox priest going in our direction. The road was narrow and ground. The priest approached us and stopped. He looked at us strictly and said in an angry voice: "Where are you going?"*

*"Home" – we answered, not understanding what is he talking about.*

*"Where is home? Couldn't you have chosen another road?" – he said.*

*"We always go this way, it is closer!" – Tolya Rubtsov said.*

*"I will show you such a thing that you will forget where your home is. Why are you going with empty buckets towards me! Let it be empty for you, not for me!" – the young priest was really angry<sup>2</sup> (Bychkova 2014, 34).*

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<sup>2</sup> This superstition apparently comes from a peasant environment.



An unpleasant experience of relations with Orthodoxy is quite common in the descriptions of the choice of evangelical faith. Disillusionment with traditional spirituality or an encounter with unethical behavior from a representative of the clergy is an impetus for the search of another, right faith.

Conflicts within the Protestant community seem more surprising at first sight. The most common ground for the conflicts was the choice of someone from an Evangelical-Baptist background moving towards the Pentecostal one. The main difference of the Pentecostals from the Baptists was the necessity to receive baptism by the Holy Spirit and some specific religious practices, which induced a strong emotional reaction in the people present. Pentecostals' preaching was very successful in the Baptist environment. Being prepared by the knowledge of the Scripture people often sought something more, a 'visible reception of the Holy Spirit'. Preaching among the Baptists was common for the Pentecostals before as well as after the War (see more Belyakova & Dobson 2015, 118-164). According to a sincere narration of a Pentecostal of a younger generation, in 1938 brother Sidor appeared in the Zhitomir region, having come from the Khmel'nitsky region:

*He was from a church having the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He was baptized by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit told him to go to our region, for God saw there many people for Himself (we had only Baptists)... He was tried and sentenced to three years of forced labor and sent to our region. Many people trusted in the Word of life and God started to baptize them with the Holy Spirit. This wave rolled over all the district, so many people left the Baptists and started to gather separately (Gula 2005, 23).*

Pentecostal preachers often visited the prayer meetings. They often became the reasons for the split within the community (see more Beliakova & Kljueva 2017; Beliakova & Kliueva 2019).

The choice of a more complete faith, becoming 'spiritual Christians', as the Pentecostals called themselves, led to the change of denomination

and to the increase of conflicts in the evangelical environment. The choice in favor of the Pentecostals was a permanent threat for the leadership of the Evangelical-Baptist brotherhood.

### Conflict with external environment

We might suggest that spiritual quest was mostly common among adults. However, children and adolescents also found themselves in the situation of quest and choice. And as for the children from non-religious families their choice concerned the worldview, it was the choice between faith and atheism, the children of believers had to choose a way of life.

In both cases the spiritual quest gave rise to conflict with the external environment and forced people to make a choice. For young people with 'atheist background' almost all their environment, including their family came to be on the opposite side of the conflict. A young Baptist remembers how her relatives responded to her joining the religious community:

*I visited it [the church] irregularly, for I was afraid of my father. My father was a tough man... I knew his attitude, it was not quite tolerant to such things. So I was afraid that his reaction would be wrong. Later it happened... When my father found out [about conversion], it was a violent reaction. He even said: "I will kill myself and you, but you will not go there." (interview with G. Gaynullina).*

It was seemingly easier for the hereditary believers, for they could receive the support inside their family, which the other children lacked, as we can see from the previous quotation. But to choose between the family (private space) and the ideological system (public space) was no less difficult. The description of traumas, inflicted at the educational establishments in one's childhood, is very eloquent and contains a lot of small details, imprinted by the child's consciousness (e.g. Vins 2000; Franchuk 2003). The narrators belonged to different generations and lived in different regions of the Soviet Union, but their descriptions of the inevitability of the 'choice' that stood before them were equally vivid.

A believer from Siberia talks about the lack of alternatives in that 'choice' and about a severe temptation which was inflicted on him at school at the end of the 1960s:

*It was something like a celebration of the 7<sup>th</sup> of November. The first-graders were given a party. Small stars were pinned on their clothes and tea with cakes was served. Money was collected to prepare it. I did not give money and said: "I will not join [the oktyabryata – the children's communist organization], guys." But when that moment came, the teacher attempted to pin a star on me. I said: "I did not give money, I will not." OK, she left me alone, and then I said: "I will leave." – "No! All the class must be present." For the teachers were also punished for that. It was a cruel system. So everyone was made to sit around the table. There were cakes and tea. She made me too as well. I said: "I did not give money, I can't." – "Sit down, it's OK..." I could not resist and drank that tea and ate that piece of cake. Today we can say: "Please, I don't want to get fat..." or something like this, but at that time a cake was served rarely. And I ate... And when it was all finished, they pinned the star on me. I said: "But... I did not give the money, I will not..." – "Really? You ate the cake and will not put on the star?" Here I lost all my arguments and went [home] with the star (interview with Y. Sipko).*

The narrator did not have to join the pioneers for the teachers at school understood, as he says, the hopelessness of pressure. But a believer of the same age from Chernovtsy understood to the necessity to make choice before joining the pioneers.

*It's not like [the parents] compelled me, I speak sincerely, – but [my mom] talked to me a little and it sunk into my soul. I came to the teacher and gave her back the text [of the oath of a young pioneer] and said: "I will not [join]" – "Why?" – "I am a believer..." – "So what? All are believers here and go to the church on Easter"... Now it is easier to stand before an audience of a thousand people and proclaim yourself a believer, than at that time before the children of your own age. Everyone lines up – there is a line every Monday – everyone wearing a tie, and [the director] Andrey Semyonovich speaks: "Children, the pioneer organization..."*

*Then the flag is raised and the horn is played. It was designed very skillfully from the point of view of ideology. The rising of the flag gives some special feeling, it is very solemn, the red ties, the horn plays, then the grade pupils come forward. "We have someone: he studies quite well, but he is a sectarian, you understand, he is not a pioneer and he works for a spy organization of imperialists..." It was so hard to stand there... (interview with V. Ivanov).*

The story of a believer in which evangelical Christians during the period of the Cold War were treated as enemies and American spies (to a large extent transferred onto their children as well) is not unique. It is quite a standard narrative about the perception of the believers' families at the Soviet school. The next point of testing was the Komsomol and the study at the university (Kliueva 2020, 139-144).

From an interview with an authoritative leader of the Council of churches, who was a member of the Council of the relatives of the prisoners of the Evangelical Christians Baptists, we find out how difficult it was for religious people to study at the university. She managed to join the Kishinev Medical Institute in Moldova (which was quite untypical for children from believers' families). The fragment quoted below is quite long; it illustrates not only the situation of choice between the religious convictions and ideological structures, but also the poly-dimensional character of human relations in the Soviet society:

*During the fourth year of study at the institute they started, of course, to press hard [concerning joining the Komsomol] – we were six people – children of believing parents. Our friendship seemed to connect us strongly; we went to the [prayer] meeting regularly together. But no one of us was a member of the Komsomol. We were pressured about joining the Komsomol. Two students who were one year older than us, were expelled from the Institute. From our group everyone joined the Komsomol, except me. I fought this and that way... They [the representatives of the Institute] decided to organize a big meeting with the presence of all our teachers and professors talking about the meaning of the Komsomol and the party at that meeting and then deciding what to do about me and what kind of measures to apply. And so it was.*

*... And so that meeting took place... And then [the representative of the city council of the Komsomol] said: "You have at least one person here who does not want to join the Komsomol. Let him speak and then we should discuss it and make a decision." I was called in front. I had only one thought: my father is praying for me now – and my heart calmed down. I went to the cathedra where professors read lectures for the first time. They asked me: "Why don't you want to join the Komsomol? Tell us all." I said: "Because this is voluntary. It means that someone joins when he wants to. And if not..." A young man stood up – we studied at school together with him, but he was in the Russian group and I was in the Moldavian one. He stood up – he was very active, even a former Komsomol leader – and said: "I am present at such a meeting for the first time. I know her for 7 years: 3 years at school and 4 years at the Institute, and I am thinking only one thing: Do non-members of the Komsomol have no right to study?! Why do we treat her like this if she never has had bad marks and attends the classes regularly... And we are discussing her only because she is not a member of the Komsomol. And those who receive F-marks in exams – we never discuss them. They follow professors until somehow they pass the exam..." He sat down. A girl stood up, also a daughter of believers, but she joined the Komsomol during the second year of studies and she became like this. We also studied together at school, even in one group, and she said: "I also have known her for 7 years and I am surprised that today we are discussing her because she is not a member of the Komsomol, how can this be?!"*

*... All friends denied me, nobody went to the [prayer] meeting, everyone joined the Komsomol. And then – as my father told me – they were given a sheet of paper with a text saying they had been having dark views before, they had not understood what that way meant and where it had led them – when they had been going to the prayer meeting and had been believers. And now it was considered that they had had a spiritual insight and learned the right way – and apostatized. So they were made to say it on the radio (interview with V.G. Khoreva).*

This narrative is notable for a few aspects: first of all, it shows the importance of the choice of perseverance in faith and social consequences of this choice. We can see the image of 'apostates' as well, who made a wrong choice. Although from a human point of view their support of a

former 'sister in faith' seems to be an act of civil courage, the narrator makes a final verdict on the apostates: she states that having made her choice she found herself on the other side of the fence, thus securing her conflict with the external environment. And those who compromised and conformed had to continue their apostasy making it a property of atheist propaganda.

### A believer as an object of the Divine influence

We considered above the situations when a person took an active position in the process of spiritual quest, however one can find in the stories the descriptions of the external influence upon the believer as well. According to the narratives the acquisition of faith could happen not only due to the spiritual quest but also in spite of it. The reception of faith is described also through the change of one's inner state due to external influence, to which the narrator could have been resisting. We should take into account that the external influence can mean both the preaching and missionary work of other believers as well as the Divine intervention, which is especially characteristic for the Pentecostal interviews. Narratives about the work of preachers are very rare for Soviet believers. They are substituted by the stories of the righteous life of those who brought the people to the community of God.

But the theme of God changing a person remains compulsory for most of the narratives. In our view, the most vivid illustration for this is a story by a Pentecostal. He talks about his baptism by the Holy Spirit against his will in a way similar to the biblical fight of James with God. He came to the prayer meeting by chance and experienced a radical change in his state there:

*I am standing there, looking around... And at that moment an electric lightning hits me... Such a feeling! The power goes through my whole body and I go into a trance. I must say I met many people who said they have met Jesus. I had a different experience: I was sure it was not Jesus who touched me, but the Holy Spirit. I knew it for sure... This power passed, I went into a trance. Then suddenly strange things started to*

*happen. The first thing was the awareness of sinfulness... I felt myself so sinful, I don't even know how to describe the difference between the holiness and the sin. I had such a feeling that I would disintegrate into the smallest particles. I had a feeling that because of my sinfulness and because God had touched me, I would turn into flying particles... fear came upon me... but not the fear of God... The Holy Spirit started to tell me: "Do not be afraid"... I heard all those things which are usually preached – the preaching of the Gospel of forgiveness. It was said and I experienced such calm. I don't know how long it lasted, but I stood up... Then I went to the hotel ... and I laid in the room alone. The Holy Spirit came upon me and... I don't know how to describe it, I could not rise from my bed for three days. Three days. I rarely tell this story. I remained in bed for three days. I only got up to go to the toilet and to drink water. And fell again. I could not stand up. I was pressed down and I had a dialogue with God. I could not entrust myself to God... (interview with V. Vityuk).*

At the moment of communication with the Holy Spirit people experienced a strong physical and psycho-emotional influence which sometimes would be observed physically.

## Conclusions

The choice of a religious denomination in the process of spiritual quest becomes a key aspect in the course of the formation of a new type of individual, personal religiosity. The believers of the first generation describe the moment of the choice of faith especially vividly. However, for the 'hereditary' believers the situation was especially harsh. They were socially labelled because of the aggressive and hostile attitude of the state ideological institutions, which put the children into the position of choice. The completion of the process of spiritual quest for the previously unbelieving youth, which happened under the conditions of atheist environment meant a radical change in the life of a person, including the change of the environment. In the respondents' narratives the gender specifics are also visible: the acquaintance with the Bible or the mystical

communication with the Holy Spirit play the main role for men, while for women the social life of the communities, the friendliness and sympathy from the believers are very important. In describing his or her spiritual quest the narrator could act not only as a rational subject of the process, but as an object of a strong Divine influence, when the active role was played by the Spirit, and not by the human being. The choice of the Evangelical faith often led to the conflict with the traditional religion of the majority, but not always meant the cessation of the spiritual quest. Inside the Evangelical faith a permanent conflict existed connected to the choice of a more 'spiritual' faith of the Pentecostals by some members of the community.

#### List of the interviews:

1. Chislina Ye., female, Baptist, Tambov, Russia (26.04. 2014. Taken by N. Belyakova. AHRC R/128120/27.)
2. Gaynullina G., female, Baptist, Tyumen, Russia (2.06.2010. Taken by V. Kliueva, personal archive of V. Kliueva)
3. Ivanov V., man, Baptist, Chernovtsy, Ukraine (25.03.2012, taken by N. Belyakova. AHRC R/128120/7.)
4. Khoreva V., Baptist, Moscow, Russia (15.02.2013, taken by N. Belyakova, personal archive of N. Belyakova)
5. Koch A., man, Pentecostal, Petropavlovsk, Khazakhstan (August 2013. Taken by V. Kliueva, personal archive of V. Kliueva)
6. Mochalkin P., man, Baptist, Kramatorsk, Ukraine (May 2012. Taken by V. Kliueva, personal archive of V. Kliueva)
7. Sipko Yu., man, Baptist, Moscow, Russia (15.04.2014. Taken by N. Belyakova. AHRC R/128120/24.)
8. Tsukov V., man, Pentecostal, Zavodoukovsk, Russia (August 2015. Taken by V. Kliueva, personal archive of V. Kliueva)
9. Vityuk V., man, Pentecostal, Nizhnevartovsk, Russia (July 2011. Taken by V. Kliueva, personal archive of V. Kliueva)



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## BREAKING THE MONOPOLY OF SCIENTIFIC ATHEISM IN SOVIET SOCIAL SCIENCE (1960s–1980s)

*Information blackout was the main tool of maintaining the leading position of scientific atheism as an integral part of Marxism–Leninism in Soviet academia. As an obligatory academic course, scientific atheism provided students with a theoretical framework, which did not allow them to see a complex picture of the function of religious institutions, religious ideas, and the activities of distinguished Church men and women. While atheism had been promoted using the instruments of the state-run propaganda institutions and the system of higher education, resistance to it was a matter of individual activity. This article deals with two cases from the history of the deconstruction of the information blackout in the field of Church and religious issues, which happened in the Soviet Union between the 1960s and 1980s. The author was not only a contemporary of the processes described in this article but also took part in the events, which are central to this paper.*

*Keywords: scientific atheism, information blackout, individual resistance, the Philosophical Encyclopedia, Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences (INION), religious ‘samizdat’ and ‘tamizdat’*

After the publication of the Resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) of July 7 and November 10, 1954, the term ‘scientific atheism’ entered the official lexicon of the party documents and “became one of the leading ideological norms of the mid-1950s” (Smirnov 2018, 149). The adjective ‘scientific’ was supposed to

highlight the high ideological status of what was described with this term (Smirnov 2018, 149). Since 1959, scientific atheism became an obligatory course in all Soviet institutions of higher education. Research areas such as Church history, religious studies, sociology of religion could exist in the USSR only as part of scientific atheism. Its dominance in Soviet academia was supported by the exclusion of any positive views of the role of religious communities in the history and the limitation of the access to the writings of national and foreign religious thinkers. This kind of information blackout testified to the fact that the educated stratum of Soviet society was meant to be isolated from any forms of knowledge, which did not fit in the official agenda. The entire system of higher education and state propaganda aimed at educating Soviet people in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism and scientific atheism (Postanowleniya CK KPSS. 2.1.1964).

Cruel criticism was the only way to mention the ‘forbidden’ names. In such a way, Soviet scholars Yuri Karjakin (1930–2011) and Yevgeny Plimak (1925–2011) wrote about Russian religious philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948) in their article for the Philosophical Encyclopedia: “Berdyaev’s bourgeois reactionary nature was exposed in the moments of class struggle [...] defending the social inequality is the true content of Berdyaev’s philosophy of freedom” (Karjakin & Plimak 1960). It is noteworthy that both authors were great admirers of Berdyaev and were proud of the fact that they had got an opportunity to review Berdyaev’s ideas after decades of complete oblivion. The *Newspeak* used in the article was the price to pay for the opportunity to publish a text about Berdyaev. There was also another trick used by Soviet scholars such as references in the text or bibliography to the works of Karl Marx or Vladimir Lenin. Sometimes, it could take even absurd forms. For example, the religious thinker Sergei Averintsev referred to the book *K. Marx and F. Engels on Religion* (Marx & Engels 1955) in the bibliography to his encyclopedia article on ‘Patristics’ (Averintsev & Sokolov 1967, 227).

On rare occasions, Soviet scholars were asked by the authorities to prepare an information note on a ‘progressive’ clergyman-politician.

Nevertheless, such notes were usually reduced to only short biographical information and a comment on whose 'class interests' the respective religious figure had been representing. As an academic discipline, scientific atheism was popular neither in society<sup>1</sup> nor in the scientific community.<sup>2</sup>

It must be noted that at the end of the 1960s, the world in general and the Soviet Union<sup>3</sup> in particular experienced a considerable religious upsurge. This upsurge came to replace a period of deep indifference or even hostility towards religion and religious institutions. While atheism was promoted by all the propaganda institutions and higher education of the USSR, resistance to atheism was a matter of individual activity. Besides, there was a time when all copy machines were controlled by the KGB, while personal typewriters were expensive and difficult to obtain.<sup>4</sup>

The appearance and development of religious samizdat was the first and most active form of breaking the information blackout on religious issues since the 1960s. The samizdat introduced many Russian religious thinkers (many of whom had been forgotten) and their ideas to the reading public. Additionally, the samizdat published texts written by Catholic philosophers whose works were completely new to the reader. Meanwhile, the productivity of samizdat was reduced to the capabilities of typewriters. It was not possible to produce more than five copies at once.

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<sup>1</sup> Specialists in scientific atheism were not popular even among the members of the party apparatus. As a rule, those party functionaries who were not able to write a dissertation, even according to pure party standards, became specialists in scientific atheism

<sup>2</sup> During our first meeting, the director of the Institute of Scientific Atheism, Victor Garaja, warned that he was a philosopher and specialist in Italian medieval philosophy (Thomism) but not in atheism.

<sup>3</sup> Initially, Soviet religious revival took the form of a movement for the restoration and protection of historical monuments of (religious) culture. In 1965, the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments was established, and, by 1971, it had more than 16 million members (!).

<sup>4</sup> In 1970, to buy an Erika (GDR) typewriter, I was waiting in line for several hours. Those typewriters were sold only to Moscow residents.

Among the activists of samizdat, translator Natalia Trauberg (1928-2009)<sup>5</sup> and Orthodox priest Alexander Men (1939-1990)<sup>6</sup> played a distinguished role. Natalia Trauberg translated, among other things, minor theological texts written by C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) and G. K. Chesterton (1897-1936). Alexander Men, in addition to his activity as a writer on historical and religious topics, was able, according to Trauberg's memoirs, "to create a factory: he organized a reprinting of the works of Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov and many other tamizdat books which had been instantly sold out" (Kolymagin 2000).

Since the late 1960s, sociological studies started to observe an increase in religiosity in Soviet society. The believers appeared to be not representatives of marginal groups but people who were successful in their professional field and private life. At the same time, art critics, experts in the so-called Old Russian Art (Icons), started to publish articles and books on the ideology of old Russian icon painters (Plugin 1974) and gave public lectures "on the literary sources of Old Russian painting".<sup>7</sup> In the late 1960s, these forms of interest in religious and spiritual issues only began to appear.

In the official scholarship, the information blackout on religious topics was broken in a very specific way. In the early 1960s, the Central Committee of the CPSU decided to prepare the Philosophical Encyclopedia under the brand of Great Soviet Encyclopedia (GSE), the most official source of knowledge in the Soviet Union. The party philosopher Fedor Konstantinov<sup>8</sup> headed the editorial board of the Philosophical

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<sup>5</sup> "She not only attracted many people to religion (with her translations and speeches) but also inspired respect to the Church in those who were spiritually indifferent" (Kolymagin 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Alexander Men received some of Western publications from the future Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill who organized the translation of these texts. For this see: (Krotow 1991).

<sup>7</sup> The matter concerns Gospel, Angiographic literature, Apocrypha. We (me and my wife) attended such lectures delivered by Valery Sergeev in the mid-1970s in Andrei Rublev Museum of Old Russian Culture.

<sup>8</sup> Fedor Konstantinov - the former head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee, and then the director of the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

Encyclopedia. Valentin Asmus (1894–1975) was the only famous specialist in Western philosophy included in the editorial board of the project. Other members of the committee were academic bureaucrats and ‘experts’ in Marxism-Leninism, dialectical materialism and struggle against religion: Mikhail Iovchuk,<sup>9</sup> Petr Fedoseev,<sup>10</sup> Yuri Frantsev,<sup>11</sup> Alexander Okulov,<sup>12</sup> etc.

Fortunately, other people were asked to edit the second volume of the Philosophical Encyclopedia. The new editorial board headed by Alexander Spirkin<sup>13</sup> prepared the changes which can be considered a break of the information blackout. However, the most significant event in the history of the Philosophical Encyclopedia was the appointment of the philosopher Renata Galtseva (1938–) as the editor of Volumes 4 and 5 with circulation of circa 60 thousand copies. Galtseva, a Moscow State University alumna, invited many young (later, very famous) scholars such as Sergei Averintsev, Sergei Horuzhy, Vladimir Bibikhin, and Ksenia Myalo to contribute to these volumes.

Nevertheless, it was not a *veni vidi vici* situation. Galtseva had to invent many different tricks to secure the publication of those articles, which seemed problematic from the perspective of the official ideology. As she recalled many years later, “The tricks which we used regarding this issue [the publication of problematic articles] did not seem inappropriate [...] it was a strategy of living behind enemy lines which had been perfectly

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<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Iovchuk – specialist in Russian materialist philosophy and former secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus.

<sup>10</sup> Petr Fedoseev – specialist on the problems of historical materialism and scientific atheism, the director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the CPSU.

<sup>11</sup> Yuri Frantsev – former director of the Leningrad Museum of the History of Religion and deputy director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the CPSU.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Okulov – the first director of the Institute of Scientific Atheism (AON under the Central Committee of the CPSU).

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Spirkin (1918–2004) – Soviet and Russian philosopher. Author of popular textbooks on Marxist philosophy.



mastered [for example] by Solzhenitsyn, a strategy justified by our high purpose. In this way, we understood our task even though this task was a local one. Therefore, this period [our] life will remain a unique one” (Galcewa 2011). Thanks to this strategy, Russian religious thinkers such as Vladimir Soloviev, Pavel Florensky, Semyon Frank, Georgy Fedotov, Nikolai Fedorov, Lev Shestov, and Evgeny Trubetskoy returned to the agenda of Soviet scholarship. The titles of the encyclopedia articles written by Sergei Averintsev can be regarded as a sign of the revival of Russian religious philosophy: historical and philosophical inquiry on concepts such as ‘salvation’, ‘fate’, ‘theism’, ‘theodicy’, ‘theocracy’, ‘theology’, ‘miracle’, ‘eschatology’, ‘Tübingen School’, ‘Christianity’ as well as biographical articles about Tertullian, Saint Maximus the Confessor, Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and many others amazed readers with their “intellectual and spiritual independence” (Latynina 2012).

After having worked for many years on the last volumes of the Philosophical Encyclopedia, Galtseva wrote: “We lived in the era of *Sturm und Drang*; in a situation ‘from under the Boulders’”<sup>14</sup>. Sergei Averintsev said later about his work on the Encyclopedia: “It was our little crusade” (Galcewa 2011). The famous theologian and priest, Vitaly Borovoy (1916–2008), jokingly said later that Averintsev was to be canonized as a saint for his articles on Christianity, which seemed to him as a feat of Christian apologetics (Krupinin 2009).

This ‘crusade’ could not happen without a scandal. One of the members of the editorial committee, Mikhail Iovchuk, wrote in his denunciation to the Central Committee of the CPSU that the encyclopedia article about Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900) was larger than the article about Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) in the same volume (Spirkin 1997). Many authors of the Philosophical

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<sup>14</sup> “Из под глыб”. YMCA-Press (Paris) (1974) - a collection by authors living in the USSR. they were devoted to the present and possible future of Russia. three articles were written by Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

Encyclopedia were afraid that Volume 5 was to be rewritten. Nevertheless, the only punishment which the authors of the volume received was the fact that they did not get the most prestigious Lenin Prize they were hoping for.

The reading public in the Soviet Union perceived the publication of the Philosophical Encyclopedia as the most important event in the intellectual life of the country. Nobel Prize winner in physics and the Full Member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Pyotr Kapitsa (1894–1984), characterized the Philosophical Encyclopedia as “the greatest achievement of Soviet philosophy” (Spirkin 1997). According to the director (1988–2006) of the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences, Vyacheslav Stepin, The Philosophical Encyclopedia “... was a kind of transition from old-fashioned Marxism to a more or less normal philosophy” (Stepin 2001).

The second blow against the information blackout and the monopoly of scientific atheism was dealt by the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (INION as an acronym for *Institut nauchnoj informacii po obshchestvennym naukam*).<sup>15</sup> This institute was founded in 1969, when the Soviet leadership got aware of the importance of having a proper information about main processes in the scientific, political, and ideological life of the world. The main task of the Institute was to provide the Soviet ideological departments and universities with information on latest scientific publications from abroad and to prepare expert reports on the ideological and political life of other countries.

Unlike many other Soviet academic institutions, the INION possessed both a big library and an extensive network of research departments, which specialized in various disciplines (history, philosophy,

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<sup>15</sup> This article partially was published in Boris Filippov. Il papa come catalizzatore dei cambiamenti: Giovanni Paolo II e la politica di informazione in URSS sulle questioni religiose // GIOVANNI PAOLO II E LA CHIESA CATTOLICA IN UNIONE SOVIETICA e nei Paesi sorti dalla sua dissoluzione Nel centenario della nascita di Karol Wojtyła (1920–2020) a cura di Jan Mikrut. Verona, 2021. 267–274

economics etc.) and regions (European socialist countries, Asian countries, Africa, Western Europe). Besides the fact that the Institute located in a building, which had been specially constructed for this propose, it received an unprecedented high funding and a unique opportunity to buy foreign books and academic journals paying for them in a foreign currency. Thus, many foreign academic books and journals could be found only in the INION.

The departments of the Institute prepared reports on foreign publications on various topics and published them in special analytical volumes. Additionally, the INION-fellows had to inform the authorities about important books in the fields of political sciences and ideology and to review the key ideas of their authors. In this work, the Institute-fellows were free from any form of institutional censorship. Those publications which could be regarded as 'ideologically dangerous' were labeled as 'for official use only' (in Soviet jargon 'DSP' – *dlja sluzhebnogo pol'zovanija*). Such volumes had a circulation of 100–2000 copies. Meanwhile, while analyzing the latest foreign publications, the INION started to play the role of distributor of anti-Marxist literature.

The new political developments and the invasion of religion into the world of politics played a very important role in breaking the information blackout on religious and church topics. This process began with the election of John Paul II to the Papal throne (1978) and the beginning of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978–1979). Additionally, the election of Jimmy Carter (1977–1981) and Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) (who represented themselves as defenders of "religious freedom" (Preston 2012; Massie 2013)) to US-presidents also made the Soviet functionaries aware of religious issues. The fact that 6 million people came to meet John Paul II during his visit to Poland in 1979 destroyed the popular theory of withering away of religion in socialist societies. It became crystal clear that the Soviet government did not have any reliable information either on the Catholic Church and religious groups in the socialist countries or on the developments of the religious thought in the world. Against the backdrop of these developments, the INION started to play an

increasingly more important role in advising the political leadership on the current events.

The fact that the Western radio broadcasts discussed religious issues more frequently also played a role in breaking the information blackout in this area. However, this process was not unproblematic. In the period between the 1970s and 1980s, the authorities put a special emphasis on their inner politics on the struggle against the views which were considered hostile to Marxism-Leninism. These ideological campaigns accompanied the preparations of the Russian Orthodox Church to the celebrations of the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baptism of Rus' in 1988. During all these years, the Central Committee of the CPSU prepared many new resolutions on the strengthening of atheist propaganda. The state-run publishers printed thousands of books with anti-religious propaganda. In one of such publications, the Moscow State University professor Igor Kanterov (1938–2018) defined the 'clerical anticommunism' in the following way: "Clerical anticommunism is, first of all, the desire to turn religious convictions into an instrument of struggle against the theory and practice of the truly revolutionary reorganization of society" (Kanterov 1979).

To understand the stylistic features of the materials provided by the INION-Fellows, one should not forget that these materials were written, first of all, for high-ranking party functionaries and teachers of Marxism-Leninism. As Institute's jokers put it, all the information had to be formulated in Orwell's *Newspeak* in a form, which would be accessible for this kind of readers. All texts prepared for the party-leadership had to be preceded by an introduction written in *Newspeak*. After that, the author could add some 'new' information to the text. The Soviet political system was a sclerotic one, i.e., was able to adopt only small pieces of new information. Soviet social scientists perfectly mastered this art of pouring 'new wine into old wineskins'. Nevertheless, it was not enough. Those texts, which could be considered problematic from the ideological point of view, were usually published under the editorship of at least two scholars. As a

rule, one of them was a famous scholar who enjoyed an excellent reputation among the party-leadership (Bibihin 2011).

There was another way to make Soviet scholars familiar with the new academic texts from abroad. The INION-Fellows prepared special 'for official use only'-collections of reviews for those scholars who were chosen to represent the Soviet Union in international scientific congresses. It is noteworthy that most anti-Marxist texts were published by the Department of Scientific Communism.<sup>16</sup> These materials were usually published under the titles such as *The Current Ideological Struggle* or *For the International Philosophical Congress*. As a research fellow of this Department, Renata Galtseva published, for example, the texts of the Catholic philosophers such as Étienne Gilson (1884–1978) and Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) which started to circulate in Soviet intellectual circles.

The Department of History also played an important role in spreading foreign academic literature on the Church History among Soviet scholars. The famous medievalist Alla Yastrebitskaya (1932–2010) prepared several volumes entitled *Culture and Society in the Middle Ages*. In these volumes, prominent historians-medievalists reviewed the recent publications of foreign colleagues on the history of medieval Christianity.

The 'authenticity' of the representation of the religious life in the socialist countries also was an issue for the INION-Fellows. The translation of Michał T. Staszewski's book *State and Religious Associations in European Socialist Countries (Państwo a związki wyznaniowe w europejskich krajach socjalistycznych)* (Staszewski 1976) into Russian (Staszewski 1979) is a good illustration of the situation in which the Institute-Fellows had to work. In the Russian version, the editors and translators not only cut back the author's text but also significantly distorted its content. All materials about the religious life of the Soviet Union were excluded from the book, while the chapter about the USSR entitled *Secularization and its Achievements* was rebaptized as *The Soviet Union – The Country of Mass Atheism*. In fact, no large sociological studies on the religious life were conducted

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<sup>16</sup> Its head (from 1970 to 1990) was Jakov Berger. (Berger, J. 2017).

in the Soviet Union. The small sociological data, which scholars had, testified to the increase in the number of baptisms, confirmations, church weddings, and funeral services. Nevertheless, the propaganda machine in the second half of the 1980s continued to stigmatize 'clerical anti-communism' and expose its intrigues in Poland.

In this context, the Department of European Socialist Countries published, in 1981, the first volume on a religious topic entitled *Church in the Socialist Countries* (Filippov 1981). Circa 60 % of the texts included into the volume were excerpts from official Marxist and pro-governmental literature. Nevertheless, there also were two informative articles entitled *The Visit of Pope John Paul II to the People's Republic of Poland* and *The Catholic Church and the Political Crisis in the People's Republic of Poland* in the appendix of the volume.

Unexpectedly, the Central Committee of the CPSU approved this volume. Moreover, the director of the institute awarded the editor of the volume with a big prize. It was a signal to other departments. Two years later, new volumes with reviews on the Western scientific and socio-political literature were published (Kimilev 1983; Razumovich & Salmin 1983). These volumes provided a very important theoretical basis for Soviet social scientists. Other departments of the INION started to publish their reviews on the newest Western literature in their areas. Later, such publications became a routine of the Institute. Meanwhile, almost every new volume became a scientific event and dealt a new blow against the information blackout in the field of religious affairs.

The next volume published by the Department of European Socialist Countries was a collection of reviews entitled *Youth Issues in European Socialist Countries* (Filippov 1985). This volume dealt primarily with the topic (*Catholic*) *Church and youth*. This and other publications prepared by the department attracted more and more attention of Soviet scholars because the INION-Fellows got the right to buy more press from Western countries. For example, from Poland, the INION received journals published by the circles of the Catholic intelligentsia (e.g. *The Sign* (*Znak*); *The Link* (*Więź*); *The Catholic Weekly* (*Tygodnik Powszechny*);

*Christian in the world (Chrześcijanin w świecie)*” et al.) and by the Jesuit and Dominican orders (e.g. *The Catholic Review (Przegląd Powszechny), On the Way (W drodze)*). More importantly, since 1983, the INION library received the Polish version of the journal *The Roman Observer (L'Osservatore Romano)* from Rome. All these materials helped Soviet scholars to get a complex picture of the processes, which took place in the Catholic Church.

In 1987, the Department of European Socialist Countries published a new volume entitled *Church in the Socialist Countries* (Filippov 1987 a) which was prepared for university professors. This volume was devoted to the issues of dialogue and cooperation between believers and atheists. This publication did not possess any special scientific relevance. Nevertheless, the introduction to the volume entitled *Church and a Socialist State: The Experience of Relationships* addressed questions, which had not been broadly discussed before. This was the first attempt to analyze the complex relationships between believers and atheists. At the same time, the department published another volume under the typical anti-religious title *Church in the Socialist Countries and Ideological Struggle* (Filippov B.1987 b). Unlike the previous volume, this one was not focused on the issue of cooperation between believers and atheists. The translations of Vatican documents such as the encyclicals *Apostolic Exhortation, Catechesis in Our Time. Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) and *Laborem exercens* (1981) along with Vatican's political documents such as *Declaration on Religious Freedom* (1980); *Declaration on Organizations and Movements Clergymen are not Allowed to Participate in* (1982); *Declaration on the Polish Question* (1982), *Instruction on Certain Aspects of Liberation Theology* (1984) became the core of the volume.

In 1987, the INION-Fellows published a special issue devoted to John Paul II (Filippov & Orlov 1987). It is noteworthy that the name of John Paul II started to appear in the Soviet press only in 1989 when the possibility of an official visit of the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to Vatican became an issue in public discussions. Then, scholars from the

INION prepared an illustrated political portrait of John Paul II for the leading Soviet academic journals such as *Science and Religion (Nauka i religia)* with circulation of 500 thousand copies (Filippov B.1989 a) and *World Economy and International Relations (Mirovaja ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye itnoshenia)* (Filippov 1989 b).

The volume *The Orthodox Church in Foreign Studies* became, perhaps, the last INION's book published under the label 'for official use only' by both the Department of European Socialist Countries and the Department of Scientific Communism (Galtseva & Filippov 1988). This volume was devoted to the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baptism of Rus' and consisted of brief texts written by the distinguished Russian émigré historians such as archpriest Alexander Schmemmann; historians Anton Kartashev, Sergei Zenkovsky, Dmitry Pospelovsky, philosophers and theologians Georgy Fedotov and Nikolai Zernov, writer Vladimir Volkov and the researcher of Orthodox culture Fairy von Lilienfeld. This volume included not only important insides into the History of the Orthodox Church but also an extensive bibliography. The photocopies of this volume had been sold on the black market as a birthday present. The next volume published by the Department of European Socialist Countries entitled *The Papacy in the Modern World* (Filippov 1991) did not have the 'for official use only' label and had a large-scale circulation.

The history of INION as an island of free information finished with the collapse of the Soviet regime. After the celebration of the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Baptism of Rus', the monopoly scientific atheism had been broken. Nevertheless, the INION publications fulfilled their mission: the information blackout was destroyed, and Soviet scholars received important information about the activity of their Western colleagues even before the fall of the Iron Curtain. A necessarily basis for the further research was formed. Renata Galtseva together with her colleagues from the Philosophical Encyclopedia and the Department of Scientific Communism made the reading public familiar with the role of Christianity in the cultural and intellectual life of the modern world. The INION-Fellow



from the Departments of History and European Socialist Countries showed the role of religious intuitions in social and political developments.

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Lyutko Eugene

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## **THE HANDBOOK FOR THE CLERGY (1988) AS A THEOLOGICAL PATCHWORK IN THE LATE SOVIET CONTEXT**

*In the middle of the 1980s, the political situation in the USSR allowed the Orthodox Church to set in motion a project for the creation of a text answering the question of what exactly a modern priest should be like. Officially, the responsibility for the realization of this project lay with the Publishing Department of the Russian Orthodox Church, but in fact a young specialist whose work had not been previously featured in a single official Church publication was selected for the task. Over the course of several years, this person succeeded in putting together a text of more than 700 pages in length. The over 40 chapters of this book, entitled *A Handbook for the Clergy. Volume VIII. Pastoral Theology* provided answers to key questions which a priest in the late Soviet period might encounter. However, the text was not the original work of the author: the book combined in its pages several dozen different sources, beginning with classic textbooks on pastoral theology and ending with the Soviet works on the culture of laughter in Ancient Rus'. The text of Volume VIII represented a sort of patchwork quilt of theological thought; in the act of sewing together the individual segments of this quilt, its compiler left traces which permit not only the original textual components of the work to be reconstructed, but also the author's own ideas, which he strove to include in the text.*

*Keywords: patchwork religion, late soviet Orthodoxy, pastoral theology, Russian Church history, ecumenical theology*

As it is well known, the religious policy of the USSR was characterised by its extreme brutality. The decree on the separation of the Church from the State, and of the education system from the Church created the

foundation for one of the most secular political regimes in history. It was retracted only in 1990. Antireligious political repression in the history of the USSR took place in several waves which attempted literally to destroy religion as a social phenomenon. The religious education of children was forbidden, and knowledge of religion was cultivated purely from the official ideological Marxist-Leninist perspective. Confessional religious education was reinstated after 1943, but found itself in a marginal position; to talk of any development in theology would be impossible.

Nonetheless, starting from the 1960s the Soviet regime enters a new phase of political, economic and ideological crisis. This crisis goes hand in hand, among other things, with a certain letting up of pressure in areas where policy had before been brutal and unyielding. *Perestroika* signifies new opportunities for traditional confessions, and above all for the Orthodox Church. What is more, in the 1980s the Soviet State reviews its policy with regard to 'ministers of cults' (служителей культа): if earlier the clergy had been thought of as a sort of ideological opponent, then in 1988 Konstantin Kharchev (b. 1934), the chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs in the period from 1984–1988, speaks of the 'development of a new type of priest. The selection and management of priests is the job of the party!'

Another element of the ideological crisis in the USSR was dissidence, which not infrequently corresponded to the religious soul-searching of the intelligentsia. Religion was persecuted in the USSR, which meant that movement in opposition to the regime was among other things' movement towards Orthodoxy. Beginning in the 1960s, more and more people with a university education start coming to the Church (Sazonov, 2017). Where were they to come by information on Orthodoxy in a situation of a total ban on the dissemination of religious literature?

The focus of this article is a subject which lies at the intersection of two processes: the relaxation of the State pressure on religion and the entry into the Church of representatives of the intelligentsia, who in a situation of intellectual famine and an elemental thirst for enquiry combined together readily available elements of various intellectual and

confessional traditions. Contemporary research calls the worldview which was formed in this way “patchwork religion.”<sup>1</sup> However, it is one thing to discuss the formation of an individual religious worldview, and another altogether when a patchwork quilt of theological ideas takes the form of a normative document.

The subject of this article is the history of a book which first saw the light of day in 1988. This book is volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy. Pastoral Theology* (Пастырское Богословие, 1988). It was the first text in the history of the Soviet period in which the Church was permitted to express Orthodox teaching on the priesthood. Owing to a number of circumstances, none of the full-time professional theologians in the Soviet ecclesiastical academies was able to take on the work of preparing this text.

### The Project of the *Handbook for the Clergy*

Nonetheless, the compiler of the eighth volume of the *Handbook*, Vladimir Keidan (b. 1946) is still alive, and the author of this paper has had the good fortune of being able to speak to him on the subject of his work on this ‘seminal edition’. This thesis will also make use of interviews with a friend of Keidan, Nikolai Kotrelev, and with the compiler of the fifth, sixth and seventh volumes Archpriest Mikhail Dronov (b. 1957). References to these sources will be given in the format of *Field Materials of the Ecclesiastical Institutions Research Laboratory (FM EIRL)*, mentioning the name of the interviewee and the date of the interview.

As Vladimir Keidan puts it,

“Under Patriarch Pimen, a decision was made and permission obtained from the Council for Religious Affairs to publish a multi-volume series of *The Handbook for the Clergy*, which was to replace

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<sup>1</sup> R. Wuthnow was the first to use this term to describe the religiosity of American people, many of whom borrow elements from the teachings of different denominations, without ever completely identifying with any single one of them (Wuthnow 1988). Since then, however, this concept has been used to describe the most widely varying contexts (Orekhanov 2015).

the photocopies and typed copies of educational texts for seminaries and academies scattered across numerous libraries, and would set standards for their teaching and the knowledge of graduates in the context of an atheist state. The most important task was to develop a modern, dynamic, standardised Russian language and writing style for Orthodox religious texts” (FM EIRL: interview with Vladimir Keidan (b. 1946 r. p.), February 2021 r. (in the following VK) § 5).

As far as can be told, the person on whose shoulders lay the real direct responsibility for the whole eight volume project was the head of the Publications Department of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Pitirim (Nechaev, 1926–2003). It was he who formulated the request which the Church addressed to the Council for Religious Affairs and which received its approval. In order for the project to be accepted, a name was found which did not entirely reflect the nature of the publication: in Russian the word for ‘handbook’ (*nastolnaia kniga* – literally, ‘book to be put on a table’) implies that a ‘book’ does not consist of more than two volumes. Metropolitan Pitirim himself called the project a “pastoral encyclopaedia,” well aware that nobody was going to keep eight thick volumes “close at hand” (Dronov 2011, 88).

To begin with, the intention was to publish three volumes of the *Handbook*: the first was to be devoted to liturgical questions and the service *Typikon*, the second to the Orthodox *Menologion*, and the third was to be a thematic index for preachers. Although the scope of the project rapidly began to expand, these general subject areas were retained. In the end, the first volume published in 1977 dealt with the *Typikon*, the second (1978) and third (1979) with the *Menologion*, and the fourth (1983) developed the liturgical themes of the first. The fifth (1986), sixth (1988), and seventh (published in 1994 after the end of the Soviet era) contained thematically sorted material arranged in alphabetic order to be used in homilies. The volumes were delegated according to area of responsibility: Archimandrite Innokentii (Prosvirin, 1940–1994) took charge of the publication of the second and third volumes; Father Mikhail Dronov of those

related to preaching (he also ran the Preaching Department at the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*). In charge of the liturgical sections was Germann Troitsky (1934–1995). According to Vladimir Keidan, it was the latter along with Metropolitan Pitirim who were at the origin of the idea for the eighth volume, which to a significant degree deviated from the original plan. The opportunity to publish an eighth - programmatic rather than referential - volume arose in the context of the celebrations for the anniversary of 1000 years of the Baptism of Rus'. The eighth volume (on 'pastoral theology') constituted a definitive break from the 'handbook' genre, which presupposed active use as a reference book by its reader. Here it was more a case of a guide or textbook to be studied diligently by priests and applied to themselves.

#### Germann Troitsky

Bearing in mind that it was Germann Troitsky who was responsible for the eighth volume, a few words should be said about him. As was written in his obituary:

“As early as the eighth grade he took the decision which would determine the course of the rest of his life – to receive a theological education. He graduated with honors first from the Saratov Theological Seminary, and then from the Leningrad Theological Academy. The Academy graduate was assigned to a responsible job abroad as an editor of the journal “The Voice of Orthodoxy” in Berlin. He then worked in the Department for External Church Relations, in the Moscow Patriarchate publishing house” [ZhMP 1995].

According to Mikhail Dronov, however, Troitsky's move to work for the Department for External Church Relations in many ways became an obstacle to him fulfilling his own academic potential. Starting from the 1960s, he played an active role in the Christian Conference for Peace, which was sponsored by *The Soviet Peace Fund*, the largest non-governmental organization in the USSR. These regular events in support of peace



were precisely the meeting point at which a consensus between the Church and Soviet politics was achieved on an international level. However, owing to personal differences with the director of the Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov, 1929–1978), Troitsky transferred to work for the Publishing Department of the Russian Orthodox Church, directed by Metropolitan Pitirim. As the warden of one of Moscow's roughly 50 churches, Troitsky had what for those times were colossal financial resources at his disposal, which he invested in the development of initiatives of the Publishing Department. Thus, as Archpriest Mikhail Dronov notes, “the work of his team was paid for from the Publishing Department budget, while Troitsky hired authors out of his own pocket” [FM EIRL Interview with Archpriest Mikhail Dronov (b. 1957), February 2021 (in the following MD §8). Our source Vladimir Keidan describes Troitsky as follows:

“He was a man very devoted to the Church, with a remarkable background, Church position, and personal destiny. However, he failed to avoid those personal problems and deformations which affected ‘Church professionals’ of that time (FM EIRL VK §8).”

#### Vladimir Keidan

Where Keidan himself is concerned, he was brought into the work on the project during the phase of compilation of the fourth volume. He was a young man, a believer with an education in the humanities who had four children and to some degree belonged to the Church dissidence. At this time, he was already seeking to be ordained to holy orders, and in Church circles he was close to Father Nikolai Pedashenko and Father Alexander Men. It is revealing that Keidan perceived his contact with a churchman such as Father Alexander Men as being in contradiction to his work in an official Church institution:

“Work in the ROC, behind the facade of its official institution, tends to weaken religious spark, whereas he, on the contrary, rekindled and fueled it” (Keidan 2013).

The recruitment of young lay believers who were also specialists in secular fields became a trademark of the Board of the Publishing Department of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1970s and 1980s, which had considerable funds at its disposal and was able to undertake large projects. Thus, Metropolitan Pitirim (Nechaev) claimed that, “when he took up his post as chairman of the Publishing Department, its staff consisted of 20 people, and when he left it there were 173 full-time employees and 300 freelance workers” (Dronov 2011, 89). In its turn, an official contract with the Publishing Department was a sought-after commodity for many young people in the Church. It was one of the few available ‘Church’ jobs: i.e., after getting a position in the Publishing Department, it was possible to enter a seminary and then to be ordained (Balabanova, Polishchuk 2009, 60).

Bearing in mind that it was precisely the use of ‘the language of theology’ which was of the utmost importance, the choice of a humanities graduate as editor was obviously justified. In light of the shortage of specialist staff in which the Russian Church found itself in those years, Keidan’s lack of a systematic theological education was seemingly compensated for by his personal religious motivation and participation in clandestine educational initiatives of a theological nature. Before Vladimir Keidan started his work, a peculiar sort of job interview process took place:

“Evgeny Karmanov asked me to write reviews on several texts from volume 4 (on the Order of Service) which had been submitted anonymously, and to make comments and additions. From the first pages it was clear to me that the texts were not correctable: one was written in Russian-Ukrainian dialect and described the church life of a Carpathian village; the other one was written in Slavo-Russian, partly in the old orthography, and did not contain a single clear definition of a sacrament or ritual, and the third was written... in blank non-metered verse in a folkloric style” (FM EIRL VK §3).

This unusual ‘job interview’, which took place before Keidan began working as a freelancer for the Publishing Department (though Keidan

cannot be regarded as an impartial observer in this case), in many ways illustrates not just the crisis of specialist personnel in the Soviet period, but also the conceptual crisis in which theology found itself at this time. Theology was in need of ‘remodeling.’

#### The Idea for Volume 8 of the Handbook

At the beginning of the 1980s, there was no talk of there being an additional eighth volume of the *Handbook*, let alone one in the format of a manual on ‘pastoral theology.’ In the planning phases was the publication of a volume on ‘ascetic theology’, which was to bear the number seven in the series. Around the middle of the 1980s, however (it has not been possible to obtain a more precise date), shortly after the decision was taken to organize celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’ (made in 1981 [Kashevarov 2015, 111]), it became clear that there was an opportunity to make a more substantial statement in order to fill the vacuum which had been created in the internal political space of the USSR by the authorities’ ‘retreat’ from militant anticlerical positions during *Perestroika*. As noted by Konstantin Kharchev (b.1934), shortly after his appointment to the post of chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs, he realised that “an opinion had formed in the very highest echelons of the party that the Church should have a place in a socialist society” (Kharchev 2015). If the Church ‘should have a place’ in the USSR, then its clergymen should have a clear understanding of the rules of conduct not just at the altar and the ambon (which the previous volumes of the *Handbook* had been dedicated to), but also in the wider context of social interaction. The eighth volume of the *Handbook* was destined to be the first (and only) instance of official Soviet pastoral theology. Subsequently, it was also to include part of the material which had already been compiled during work on the seventh volume on asceticism.

### The Compiler's Laboratory

The eighth volume of the *Handbook for the Clergy* consists of 44 chapters which are not divided into any sort of larger sections. To reconstruct the logic of its structure is no easy task, which may also be said for any attempt to summarize its content. The official editor, G. Troitsky, tries unsuccessfully to describe the eighth volume from the point of view of its structure in a resumé which he published in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. In the end, he identifies a “*historico-exegetical section* (chapters 2–5), *foundational sections* (chapters 14–17), a *general section*” (chapters 18–36) and so on. The resumé does no more than enumerate the chapters, parts and sections and provide platitudinous introductory comments to the effect that one thing belongs to the “foundational sections,” while “particular attention is devoted” to something else, one more thing “receives emphasis,” and yet another is “given serious consideration” (Troitsky 1990, 80). As a result, the structure reflects the fact that the content to a great extent was the fruit of a personal and very much independent spiritual enquiry conducted by Vladimir Keidan, and if Troitsky understood this process at all, then it was not in full. Neither in fact did he attempt to understand it in full.<sup>2</sup>

Keidan's religious conversion took place when he was already an adult, and his understanding of Orthodoxy was nourished by the sparse works of theological literature available in the Soviet Union in those years. As a consequence, the eighth volume represents a collection of texts which seemed important to a young Orthodox intellectual from the perspective of his desire to become a member of the clergy. As far as we have been able to ascertain, the only sections of this work written solely by Keidan himself are the preface and the introduction. The greatest authorial contribution to the main body of the text was made by Keidan's friend

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<sup>2</sup> “Unfortunately, over the course of their more than ten-year collaboration, this control [Troitsky's] weakened owing to his chronic illness”. FM EIRL VK §7. “As I witnessed with my own eyes, he suffered from epilepsy.” FM EIRL MD §1

Vladimir Zelinsky,<sup>3</sup> who wrote parts of the chapters on *An Understanding of the Conscience from the Point of View of Pastoral Theology*, and *Sin –the Point when Spiritual Life Falls Apart* (FM EIRL VK §6). Overall, the volume comprised a thematical compilation of theological and philosophical texts.

Thirty-five years on, Keidan and Father Vladimir Zelinsky themselves do not fully remember the sources they used for their work. Starting from a hypothesis that the entire text of Vol. VIII is of a secondary nature, we are presented with the task of identifying the sources of which it is comprised. It is difficult to judge to what degree this task has been successfully accomplished; nevertheless, at least 38 sources have been identified where a text has been reproduced either in full, or more often in part, in the 44 chapters of Volume VIII.

#### Volume VIII as Patchwork

In some cases, the chapter names in Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* either completely or partially reproduce the names of the original works they were taken from, and it was easier to discover what the sources were. More often than not, however, under the chapter headings were hidden borrowings from one or a number of texts. Where this proved to be the case, we turned to the internet to search for fragments of the text. One or another selected fragment of a chapter was inserted into the search field and sometimes led us to the source text. The process of searching for the original source by this method was rendered more difficult by the significant amount of stylistic adaptation made by the compilers and editors of Volume VIII of the *Handbook*. Finally, in a series of cases in which it was impossible to use either the first or second methods, we were able to discover a similarity between the thought processes in one chapter or another of the *Handbook for the Clergy* and the work of Orthodox

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<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Zelinsky (b. 1942) is now a priest of the Orthodox Church in the city of Brescia. He is a publicist and translator.

theologians with whom we were familiar. On some occasions, such comparisons also turned out to be productive. It should be noted that Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* contains an appendix in the form of a bibliography (pp. 711–717), which nonetheless does not represent a list of the source literature used. On the one hand, however, it contains works which were definitely not used as source material. As a rule, these are patristic texts and works by 19th century authors. Their presence in the bibliography is more of a nod towards the most authoritative texts in this area, in part in an attempt to root Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* itself in pastorological tradition. On the other hand, only a small number of the source texts whose genuine presence in the text of the *Handbook* has been successfully identified appear in the bibliography. Overall, it is hard to avoid the impression that the bibliography was created after the fact, and that the compiler put it together by adding the real sources he was able to remember to a ‘canonical list’ of pastorological literature.

Looking through the list of works which make up Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy*, let us attempt to distinguish the key layers of its sources, and thus to classify the colourful collection of material out of which this ‘patchwork quilt’ of theological ideas was sewn together.

1. *Official Discourse*. The official discourse on the Orthodox Church in the USSR was intimately connected with ideas of peace. Without a shadow of a doubt, *мирология* or *иринология* – the theological ‘science of peace’ – received its most intensive academic elaboration in the USSR. Almost every edition of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* contained a section ‘in defence of peace’, and the overall number of publications to do with peace and peace activism in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* and *Theological Works* (another official Church periodical) is more than 2000. Germann Troitsky himself was at one time the vice-president of the Youth Commission of the Christian Conference for Peace and he published copiously on this topic (Troitsky 1976). Here is not the place to

discuss the role played by the Russian Church in Soviet foreign policy; it might simply be noted that within the Church the subject of peace activism was regarded without enthusiasm, and the regular collections for the Peace Fund were looked upon as an unavoidable tribute, permitting the Church organisation to visibly demonstrate its “usefulness” (Sazonov, Fedotov 2018, 38). Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* also contained corresponding material. It is true that this was only included in the last chapter: such ‘neglect’ of a flagship theme seems to have reflected the personal position of V. Keidan towards the Church narrative of his era. In the final analysis, the 44th chapter, entitled *Pastoral Ministry and Peace Activism* was made up of three publications which had first seen the light of day in the pages of *Theological Works* (Voronov 1971, Timofeev 1986, Igumnov 1986).

2. *Pastoral Theology*. A significant part of volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* was what might be called normative Church narrative on the pastorate, i.e., texts from within the academic discipline of ‘pastoral theology.’ Here, of course, stands out the course book by Archimandrite Cyprian (Kern, 1899–1960).<sup>4</sup> Shortly after the publication of volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* (despite the fact that the edition is dated 1988, it only came off the press in 1990), the opportunity appeared to publish Archimandrite Cyprian’s lectures themselves. The copies sold out immediately (which in many ways led to Volume VIII being forgotten in post-Soviet Russia) (Shkarovsky 2016, 255–256) and remain to this day almost essential manuals for future priests in the Russian Church; they are to be found on the reading lists of all modern pastoral theology courses in ecclesiastical seminaries and academies (Krihtova 2021, 134). The ‘Parisian’ version of Orthodox pastoral theology in Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* is also supplemented with other works by theologians from the emigration: those of Protopresbyter: Georgii

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<sup>4</sup> One other work by Father Cyprian used in volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* is his research on Orthodox anthropology (Kern 1950).

Shavelsky (1871–1951) (Shavelsky 1930) and Archbishop Ioann (Shakhovskoi) (Shakhovskoi 1935). Despite the fact that in general V. Keidan and his supervisor G. Troitsky were unsympathetic towards pre-revolutionary pastoral theology<sup>5</sup> and the pastoral theology produced in the USSR, some works of Soviet Russian pastorologists were used in Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy*, in particular those of Bishop Benjamin (Milov, 1877–1955) (Milov 2002) and Archimandrite of the Great Schema Ioann (Maslov, 1932–1991). At that point they had not yet been published, and V. Keidan used typewritten texts which were kept in the ecclesiastical-academic library in Zagorsk (modern day Sergiev Posad).

To the pastoral block were added works connected in one way or another with the priesthood and other questions relating to the Church hierarchy, liturgical theology and ecclesiology. Once again, one of the authors who features most frequently here is another theologian of *The Paris School*, Archpriest Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944): his work *The Orthodox Church* is used in at least four chapters of Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* (Bulgakov 1962). One of the most significant theologians of the Soviet era, Archbishop Mikhail (Mudiugin, 1912–2000) was also included (Mudiugin 1980, Mudiugin 1983). The most famous Orthodox theologians of the 20th century also found their place in Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy*: Protopresbyter Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958)<sup>6</sup> and Alexander Schmemmann (1921–1983) (Schmemmann 1950). Russian Orthodoxy from the opposite side of the Atlantic was represented in the works of the ROCOR Bishops Mitrofan (Znosko-Borovsky, 1909–2002) - in the form of extracts from his work on comparative theology - and Alexander (Mileant, 1938–2005), one of whose many missionary brochures was used. ‘Official’ Church positions on

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<sup>5</sup> Only one pre-revolutionary text on a pastoral theme is included in volume VIII (Tikhomirov, 1915–1916).

<sup>6</sup> Whose key work, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, had by this time already been published in the USSR: (Lossky 1972).



several more issues were elucidated using material published in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (Vetelev 1954, Urzhumtsev 1962), and chapter eight of volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* “on the question of the ordination of women”, seems to give clear evidence of Keidan being familiar with a hitherto unpublished collection of articles by Konstantin Skurat (b. 1929), kept in the library of the Moscow Theological Academy.<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that the relatively dry canonical cogitations of chapter eight are rounded off with some colourful and emotional passages from a letter of Father Alexander Schmemmann to a friend and member of the Episcopal Church in the USA.<sup>8</sup>

3. *A Church Intellectual's Private Readings.* All of the above could to some degree be said to constitute part of a sort of ‘mandatory programme’, i.e., what, in the opinion of the State and the Church hierarchy, a priest ought to know (in as far as the State and the Church hierarchy can be regarded as a single subject, projecting an ideal of ‘priestly knowledge’). However, Volume VIII contained a major stratum of texts, the presence of which can be linked with the personal initiative of the compiler, who considered them significant for an Orthodox priest in the USSR. These are works above all with a philosophical, historico-cultural, and psychological content, and also texts from other Christian confessions. Vladimir Keidan is well-known as one of the ‘first discoverers’ of Russian religious philosophy as a socio-historical phenomenon, so it is not surprising that upon opening his *Handbook*, a clergyman should come across writings by E. Trubetskoi (1863–1920) (Trubetskoi 1918) and S. Frank (1877–1950) (Frank 1953). The particular interest of V. Keidan in the thought of the *Silver Age* of Russian culture explains the presence in volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* of fragments of a typewritten text by the priest

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<sup>7</sup> The said collection contains an identically named article: Skurat K. On the question of the ordination of women. *Collected Works in 22 Volumes*, volume five. Collection of articles from 1977–1978. Troitsa-Sergieva Lavra, pp. 245–256

<sup>8</sup> V. Keidan used the German translation by the Orthodox theologian K. Felmy (Schmemmann 1975). Compare the original (Schmemmann 1973).

Valentin Svetsitsky entitled *Six Readings on the Sacrament of Confession and its History* (1926). The vision of a priest-intellectual, deeply immersed in the problems of contemporary man (which seems to have been close to V. Keidan's heart in this period) was represented by the priest and thinker Alexander Elchaninov (1881–1934) (Elchaninov 1935). Neither did the compiler miss out Father Alexander Men, with whom he was on friendly terms (Men 1981).

V. Keidan's priest was required to be up to date with the most current themes which were being debated in society at the time. One of these themes was 'pastoral psychology', which has now already been fully included in the standard program of preparation for the priesthood, but in the 1980s was only emerging as being something of relevance for the priest. Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Priesthood* contains lengthy extracts from the work of D. E. Melekhov (1899–1979), *Psychology and Contemporary Problems of Spiritual Life* (Melekhov 1989–1990), and in this regard Keidan considerably expanded the short section on pastoral psychology contained in the lectures of Archimandrite Cyprian (Kern). It should be noted that Melekhov's work was only published in 1989, and as in a series of other cases, V. Keidan was obviously working with a text which was being prepared for publication.

A priest should be able to use the means 'at hand' for spiritual growth. Where this is concerned, the most noteworthy section is also that on preparation for confession, where the topic "laughter and humour as a means of overcoming pride" is handled on the basis of the collective monograph *Laughter in Ancient Rus'*, edited by D. S. Likhachev and published in 1984 (Likhachev 1984). In general, it may be remarked that the compiler's intention is to 'treat' his reader with completely new texts which were either inaccessible to the Soviet reader, or else seemed entirely abstruse as material for a manual for the clergy. Thus, for the theme of ecumenical dialogue, which had been presented in the Soviet Church press, in chapter 41 on *Theological Problems of Ecumenism*, V. Keidan preferred a

recent article by Archimandrite Placide (Deseille, 1926–2018) (Deseille 1986), a French theologian and former Catholic monk and priest, published in the *Messenger of the Russian Christian Movement*. The next two chapters of volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy, Problems on Christian Unity from an Orthodox Perspective*, and the *Bilateral Retraction of Anathemas*, which also touch on ecumenical issues, consist mainly of extracts from O. Clément's book *Conversations with Patriarch Athenogoras*. The Russian translation of this book was only published in 1993, but its translator Vladimir Zelinsky, who has already been mentioned above, obviously must have given V. Keidan the opportunity to work with a manuscript of the translation (Clement 1993).

The Russian Church, especially after Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov), has not been characterized by a militant attitude towards other Christian denominations, in particular to the Roman Catholic Church. For this reason, the pro-ecumenical sections of Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* could not have shocked either those who gave their blessing to the publication, nor the greater part of the readership it was intended for. Things could have been more complicated with the inclusion in the *Handbook* of passages taken directly from texts of Roman Catholic origin. Nonetheless, a series of issues – above all on the role of the priest in the rapidly changing modern world – had not benefited from adequate examination within the Orthodox tradition, which forced the compiler to turn to the works of Roman Catholic authors. Thus, chapter four *On the People of God and Pastors*, as well as chapter six *On the Pastoral Vocation* contain sizeable borrowings from the *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, the collective works of the best Catholic theologians of the 1960s (Lesquirit, Leon-Dufour 1990; Guillet 1990. In chapter 30, *The Eucharist as the Center of Pastoral Ministry*, extracts can be found from a book by the well-known representative of the Worker-priests' movement and talented missionary Pierre Thivollier (1910–2004) (Tivole 1963). Last but not least, there was the most pressing problem of all: the absence of an up-to-date narrative on preparation for the priesthood. In chapter seven of Volume VIII of the

*Handbook for the Clergy, On Preparation for the Priesthood*, V. Keidan solved this problem with the help of the *Optatam Totius* decree from the Second Vatican Council (1965) (Koval 1998).<sup>9</sup> This document “was meant to correspond to a spirit of openness to the world ‘*aggiornamento*,’ so that priests trained in this way were able to answer the needs of modern people” (Cherny 2019, 50). After the era of Stagnation, the ‘*aggiornamento* of *Pere-stroika*’ was intended to encompass the whole of society, including the priest.

### The Nature of the Work on the Text in Volume VIII

Although Volume VIII is comprised of texts by the above-mentioned authors (and probably many others whom we have not managed to identify), this in no way means that it was put together based on a principle of the quotation of texts in their entirety. A considerable amount of work was done in terms of stylistic adaptation with the aim of unifying the text, and to some degree even of ‘Sovietizing’ it, that is of lowering the level of expressiveness of individual authors, and removing specific philosophical and theological terminology not required in a manual directed towards the Russian clergy as a whole body. Furthermore, at times the compiler develops the authors’ thoughts himself. We may recall the task the publication was intended to fulfill: to create a modern language of philosophical discussion, neither completely deviating from pre-revolutionary and émigré traditions, nor completely coinciding with them. Naturally enough, the extent of the editor’s efforts varied depending on the nature of the source material. Here the content of only one chapter will be examined – “On Preparation for the Priesthood” – with the aim of showing how the style of late-Soviet pastoral theology was born at the crossroads of cultures and languages.

Of course, the riskiest decision was the inclusion of sources from other confessions: it was precisely here that it was not style which was

<sup>9</sup> In all probability, V. Keidan worked with the German translation of the decree, since fragments of the text included in volume VIII significantly differ from the Russian translation released in 1998 (Brechtler 1966).

significant, but meaning. Bearing in mind that what was being produced was a normative text for hundreds of Orthodox priests of the Russian Church, the level of responsibility was correspondingly high. Chapter seven of Volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy* constitutes a mix of interspersed extracts from Archimandrite Cyprian Kern's textbook and from the *Optatam Totius*. It is a fact that one of V. Keidan's foreign languages was German, and a textual comparison reveals that one of the sources for chapter seven was indeed a German translation of the decree.<sup>10</sup> His text is adapted in an unusual way: in particular, Catholic ordinands are called to "search for Christ" in 1) "sincere meditation on the Word of God"; 2) "active communication with the most holy Sacraments of the Church"; 3) "the Bishop"; 4) "in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, children, the sick, sinners and unbelievers". For Russians, the figure of the bishop is excluded, as are the poor, children, the sick, sinners and unbelievers. The category of a "rule of prayer" is introduced. In this way, on the one hand the emphasis on the figure of the bishop, typical for Catholic ecclesiology, is removed, and the narrative on preparation is supplemented with an indication towards prayer as a central element of pastoral obligations within the framework of the theology of the Eastern Church.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the priest is rendered "harmless" as an actor in social ministry and thus brought into line with Soviet legislation which did not permit the religious education of children.

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<sup>10</sup> In the German translation of the decree, there is the following sentence: "Durch die heilige Weihe werden sie einst Christus dem Priester gleichförmig," and it is obvious that the text in volume VIII of the *Handbook for the Clergy*, "destined through ordination to conform to the likeness of Christ the High Priest" is a calque on this sentence. Compare the modern translation: "May they who are called to be conformed to the likeness of Christ the Priest through the laying on of hands, accustom themselves to..." See Table 1.

<sup>11</sup> See the classic work *On the Duties of Parish Presbyters* (1776), in which prayer together with teaching and performance of the sacraments are seen as the key obligations of the priest.

Optatam Totius §4.8. Brechter, 1966	Pastyrskoe bogoslovie 1988, 88.
Die geistliche Formung soll mit der wissenschaftlichen und pastoralen Ausbildung eng verbunden sein. Unter Anleitung vor allem des Spirituals sollen die Alumnen lernen, in inniger und steter Gemeinschaft mit dem Vater durch seinen Sohn Jesus Christus im Heiligen Geist zu leben. <u>Durch die heilige Weibe werden sie einst Christus dem Priester gleichförmig</u> ; so sollen sie auch lernen, ihm wie Freunde in enger Gemeinschaft des ganzen Lebens verbunden zu sein (...)	Spiritual (preparation should be closely linked to doctrinal and pastoral training, and with the aid of a spiritual father should be conducted in such a way that future clergymen learn to live in deep and constant communication with God. <u>Destined through ordination to conform to the likeness of Christ the High Priest</u> , they strive for intimate union with him, learn to experience the mystery of Christ's Resurrection in order in the future to be able to consecrate within it the people entrusted to them, to search for Christ in sincere meditation on the Word of God, in active communication with Him in the Sacraments and <b>a rule of prayer.</b>

If the text of the *Optatam Totius* degree was in need of translation and adaptation in terms of its meaning, a typical example of stylistic adaptation, also in Chapter seven, is the work on Archimandrite Cyprian Kern's classic text. A theologian of the *Paris School* with an encyclopedic education and a fiery and at times even harsh temperament, his use of language is characterised by a significant number of individual traits. That *Orthodox Pastoral Ministry* was written in a style redolent of the 'spoken word' is explained by the fact that it was,

"no more than a recording of lectures given 'out of obedience', since pastorology was not my specific area of expertise and not as interesting to me as my specialism, patristics (and to some degree liturgics)" (Sukhova 2012, 80),

as Archimandrite Cyprian himself described his work.

Kern 1957, 53 (differences are <b>highlighted</b> )	Pastyrskoe bogoslovie 1988, 87
<p>A <b>candidate</b> to the priesthood, a future pastor, is preparing to start out on the spiritual path, or to use the Russian term, to join the clergy (<i>духовенство</i>). This word in itself imposes many obligations. <b>Its meaning does not completely correspond to that of its equivalent terms in other languages: <i>sveshtenstvo</i> (Serbian); the <i>klir</i>, <i>clergé</i>, <i>clergy</i>, (Greek, French, English); its sense rather corresponds to the German notion of <i>Geistlicher</i>, from <i>Geist</i>, i.e., <b>spirit</b>. This means that the clergy must above all be spiritual. This implies belonging to the Kingdom of the Spirit, not to the kingdom of <b>social</b> ordinariness, to the sphere of material calculation and <b>interestedness, political</b> striving and so on. It is first of all the nurturing within oneself the spirit of the Kingdom of God, of building it within oneself, <b>for it is not to be found somewhere on some earthly territory, but inside ourselves. The Kingdom of God is not a theocratic idyll, but a category of our spirituality.</b></b></p>	<p><b>The seeker</b> after the priesthood (<i>взыскующий священства</i>), the future pastor, is preparing to start out on the spiritual path, or, according to the old Russian term, to “join the clergy” (<i>духовенство</i>). This word in itself imposes many obligations. It means that the future cleric must, first of all, <b>acquire the gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit</b>. He is preparing to completely surrender himself to the Kingdom of the Spirit, not to the kingdom of earthly ordinariness with its calculation, desires, and fleshly temptations. Above all, this presupposes self-education in the spirit of the Kingdom of God, the building up of it in oneself.</p>

This key passage on the final stage in pastoral preparation perfectly illustrates the intentions of the compiler and his method of working on the text. As can be seen, the most obvious change is that Keidan cuts out the linguistic apparatus provided by Kern with the aim of elucidating the term *духовенство* ‘clergy’ through a comparison with the translations of this word in other European languages. In his turn, Keidan does not leave the text without any additions: the category of ‘spiritual’ receives a slightly different development in his interpretation from that of Kern. If the latter makes appeal to the Hegelian category of the ‘Kingdom of the Spirit’,

then Keidan adds at this point the idea of the ‘acquisition of the gifts of the Holy Spirit’, which had become particularly popular in Russia through its connection with the name of Saint Seraphim of Sarov (1754–1833), who identified the “acquisition of the Holy Spirit” as the main aim of the Christian life (Motovilov 1914). The circumspection with which Keidan handles political and social terminology is worthy of attention: he removes from the text the words ‘political’, ‘social’, ‘theocratic’, i.e., everything which could somehow suggest any sort of political awareness on the part of the priest, whose unequivocal socio-political neutrality was an important element of that unspoken contract on which the precarious legitimacy of the priesthood in the USSR was based.

Where outwardly the apoliticism of the priesthood is expressed, on the other hand its political significance is nonetheless implied. Thus, the archaism *взыскующий* ‘seeker’ with which Keidan replaces the word ‘candidate’ in Kern’s text, is a biblicism taken from a phrase of the Church Slavonic translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews (“For here have we no lasting city, but **we seek** one to come” [Hebrews 13:14], in Church Slavonic: “ne imamy bo zde prebyvaiushchago grada, no griadyshchago vzyskyem”). The term *vzyskuiushchii* does not have a fully analogous equivalent in modern Russian. It suggests a sort of ‘active hope’ for something. As an idiom, the ‘seeker of the city’ *vzyskuiushchii grada* gained currency in Russian literary language starting from the end of the 19th century: a ‘seeker of the city’ denoted someone who was “searching for better forms of life, social justice” (Ashukin, Ashukina 1988, 52). At the same time, the participle *vzyskuiushchii* acquired an existence of its own in literary language, separate from the original idiom, though still close to the meaning of the biblicism, or even ‘competing’ with this meaning, and by virtue of this signifying not simply ‘seeking for’ as in searching for or trying to achieve something, but ‘seeking after’ in the sense of ‘striving for an ideal’ (Lilich 1995, 112).

Beginning with the 1960s, ‘seeking after the priesthood’ became one of the most common paths taken by Soviet intellectuals disillusioned with the Soviet regime. In many ways, it was an intuitive movement towards



other forms of cultural life persecuted in the USSR, and here Russian religious philosophy went hand in hand with the Russian Church, despite the fact that up until the Revolution in 1917, relations between these two cultural phenomena had been difficult. Keidan, whose ‘seeking after the priesthood’ was not rewarded with success for political reasons, embarked on a parallel course and immersed himself in pre-revolutionary Russian religious philosophy, of which to a great extent he became the ‘first discoverer.’” For many years, he worked on the publication of sources of a personal nature connected with Russian philosophers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, in the context of an anthology which received the title *Vzyskuiushchii Grada* (see above, “Seekers of the City”) (Keidan 1997; Keidan 2018–2020). This title was linked by Keidan’s colleague Vladimir Zelinsky to the epigraph *Adveniat regnum tuum* (Your Kingdom Come, [Mt. 6:10]) with which Peter Chaadaev prefaced his *First Philosophical Letter*, which, in Zelinsky’s words, “The avalanche of Russian thought began to gain momentum” (Zelinsky 2018, 9–11). Thus, the expression ‘seeker after the priesthood’, which Keidan may not have chosen arbitrarily in his reworking of Archimandrite Cyprian Kern’s text, reflects not just his personal taste for the humanities, but a vision of the Orthodox priesthood as possessing significant socio-political potential: a vision of the priest as the precursor of a new political order. It is noteworthy that Keidan’s decision, taken in 1990, to emigrate from Russia was also connected with the figure of a priest. It was caused by the murder of Father Alexander Men (1935–1990), whom Keidan considered,

“a holy, righteous man whose presence, in my opinion, would have changed the spiritual and social situation in Russia. At that time, he had begun a frenetic activity, giving a lecture somewhere almost every day; I went to his lectures. He rekindled my fading hope for a renewal of Russia and of myself. (...) This news was simply a devastating blow for me (...) I had one clear thought: I don’t want to go back; this is no longer my country” (Keidan 2013)

## Conclusions

“As it appears to me, in the seventies and eighties the employees of the Council for Religious Affairs attempted artificially to create a sort of phenomenon of a “Soviet priest”, who would unite Christian and Marxist convictions. This experiment was a complete fiasco. It turned out to be impossible to create such a phenomenon, whereas it was comparatively easy to train up a significant number of unprincipled clergymen...” (Pospelovsky 1995, 393).

These words, taken from someone who was a witness to what went on in this era - Mikhail Arlov - may be said to represent one of the most frequently encountered interpretations of late-Soviet Church history. If there is a certain amount of truth in them, then there is certainly also a certain amount of misconception. The perception of what a priest should be like in late-Soviet society was formed in a situation of crisis in which any sort of consistent and well-thought-out knowledge - all the more so in the field of Orthodox theology - was impossible. The only thing which the Church could permit itself in this situation was a patchwork quilt of theological ideas collected together from differing theological traditions and without any particular systemisation. Our attempt to systemize this cacophony has allowed three significant discourses to be identified which might, with a degree of circumspection, be categorised as official, traditional and intellectual. This was the basis for the unusual consensus which stood behind this patchwork quilt of theological ideas: certain demands were made by the State, and some basic ideas were taken into account from a tradition which went by the name of *Pastoral Theology*. Finally, the open-minded approach of the compiler, Vladimir Keidan, called for the inclusion of new and at times surprising elements which were intended to correlate discourse on the Orthodox priest with contemporary problems in the Church and in society.

Who, in this situation, was Vladimir Keidan? He was not the author. He was not the compiler in the traditional understanding of this word: as has been demonstrated, he made unilateral incursions into the structure

of the text. His role might be described as the craft of a *bricoleur*. Unlike an engineer or other specialist, a *bricoleur* (if Lévi-Strauss's traditional description is adopted) is not dependent on raw materials or tools; he solves a task using whatever means are to hand. When selecting and storing the means for the achievement of his aim, the *bricoleur* is guided by a project and orients himself on instinct; everything he has collected corresponds to the principle, "they may always come in handy" (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 14).<sup>12</sup>

The end result was a unique text which could be said to be without equivalent not only in the history of theology, but in the history of the humanities in their entirety - a sort of 'ecclesiastical *samizdat* with an official cover'. The eighth volume was like a strange anthology of key theological texts from the 20th century, in which the names of the real authors were concealed, and the texts themselves, on the one hand, depersonalised, and, on the other hand, endowed with the characteristics of the personal worldview of the compiler.

The book appeared because an opportunity emerged to publish it. Perhaps it is precisely this circumstance which has determined the fate of this project in recent history. Demand for Volume VIII has been nothing if not considerably less than that envisaged by its publishers. The Soviet Union collapsed, and with it vanished the need for a 'Soviet priest'. Clergymen and lay believers alike gained access to the legacy of pre-revolutionary theological thought and the works of émigré theologians, which were now published in editions of vast numbers without any sort of censorship and with the names of the authors indicated, thereby giving readers the opportunity to enter into a symbolic dialogue with them.

There can be no doubt that the absence of any sort of coherent agenda in the eighth volume is an important conclusion which enables connections to be made between the period of *Perestroika* and the present. That indeterminacy which characterises the vision of the Orthodox priest in

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<sup>12</sup> See Peter Berger on how patchwork and bricolage are different descriptions of one and the same phenomenon (Berger 2011, 106).

the *Handbook* is undeniably reflected in contemporary discussion on the priesthood in the Church and in society. The question now faced by ecclesiastical thought is whether this indeterminacy needs to and can be overcome, or whether it is in itself in some way theologically significant, and any attempt to overcome it would be to go ‘against the time we live in’.

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## THE SERVICE AND SERMONS OF ARCHPRIEST TAVRION (BATOZSKIY) AND ARCHPRIEST SERGIY (SAVELYEV) AS AN EXAMPLE OF STRIFE FOR SPIRITUAL FREEDOM UNDER THE COMMUNIST IDEOLOGICAL TYRANNY IN SOVIET RUSSIA IN THE 1960s-1970s

*This report uses the data from the sermons belonging to Archpriest Tavrion (Batozskiy) and Archpr. Sergiy (Savelyev). The focus is on their ministry in the 1960s-1970s, one of the most difficult times for the Russian Orthodox Church, when the majority of the old-school priests died in the labour camps while the young ones were the products of the Soviet system, some of them government appointees. Their unwavering faith and steadfast Christian love challenged atheistic 'soviet spirituality', that denied individual freedom and destroyed human spirit. In the 1960s-1970s Archpriest Tavrion was the head and Spiritual leader at the Spaso-Preobrazhensky Convent near Yelgava, Latvia, while Archpriest Sergiy served as a parish priest at the Pokrov Church in Moscow. It was this time that became for Frs. Tavrion and Sergiy final period of their life and ministry – the most spiritually significant. Most of the sermons extant was delivered during that period.*

*Keywords: Church, Archpriest Tavrion (Batozskiy), Archpr. Sergiy (Savelyev), service, sermon*

## Introduction

Throughout the 70 years of the Soviet rule, Christians had undergone an intense persecution at the hands of the atheist government. The mission of the Bolshevik Communist Party was to annihilate Christianity and its traditional values and to replace it with the new progressive soviet spirituality. The 1960s–1970s were marked by the increase of the persecution against the church initiated by Khrushchev. Remarkably, this time was also marked by a growing interest in religion and Russian Orthodoxy among the intelligentsia and, particularly, among younger people, whom Protopr. Vitaliy Borovoy<sup>1</sup> described in his sermons as the generation of individuals, “raised in atheistic homes as non-believers [...] who had found Christ after long soul-searching and spiritual reflection” (Pospelovskiy 1995, 373). At the time, unfortunately, Orthodox Church was unable to address this budding spirituality with the open sermon. By the mid-1960s the majority of old-school priests had died in the Soviet labour camps, while many new ones, having grown up in Soviet society, were unable to separate the church life from the imposing soviet socialist ideology. All priests were controlled by the local government officials.

Under the circumstances, the pastoral sermon about Jesus Christ and his Gospel openly delivered by Archpr. Tavrion (Batozskiy), the spiritual leader at the Spaso-Preobrazhenskiy Convent near Yelgava, Latvia and Archpr. Sergiy (Savelyev), the parish priest at the Pokrov Church in Moscow was unique and courageous. Both priests – Fr. Tavrion and Fr. Sergiy belonged to the same generation and were not far apart in age. Both started their spiritual journey before the Russian Revolution of 1917. From a young age they both were yearning God’s Truth and seeking to humbly serve Him and the people. However, their spiritual paths differed.

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<sup>1</sup> Protopr. Vitaliy Borovoy (1916–2008) – famous priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, protopresbyter, professor, Doctor of Theology. From 1963–1995, he was Deputy Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

## Frs. Tavrion's (Batozskiy) and Sergiy's (Savelyev) spiritual paths

Tikhon Batozskiy (Fr. Tavrion) fell in love with the church services when he was a little boy, "With all my heart I felt this openness in front of the Lord, couldn't think of anything other than to love our Heavenly Father, and had believed strongly that it is through His will that I lived and walked" (Kostina 2010, 14). When he turned 8, Tikhon became the Altar boy, at 14 he joined the Glinskiy Monastery, at the time open to the pilgrims. As a novice at the monastery, he worked at an icon painting shop. He also attended school for the missionaries.

Vasiliy Savelyev (Fr. Sergiy) was raised in the Russian Orthodox tradition by his mother. However, he found God later in his life, following a spiritual journey typical of young people of his generation, first studying Russian literature, history, arts and philosophy. He wrote about this time in his life,

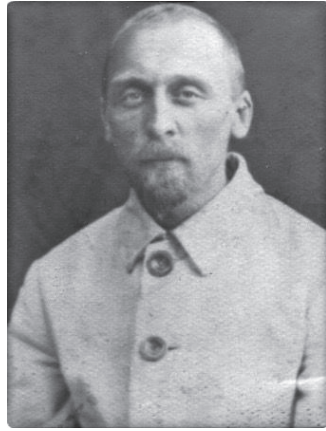
"[...] as a young boy I attended the Technical School and didn't particularly like going to church. And, then it so happened that the Lord had me devote my entire life to the Church. Why? Because my soul was running around in search of [...] What? Where? Where is the Truth? And I had an opportunity to observe It everywhere. In the 1920s, in Moscow every door would open to welcome me. I could meet every distinguished person, writers, thinkers. I watched and listened to what they had to say.<sup>2</sup> Nah, not what I am looking for. My faith was pulling me, pulling me towards God" (Sergiy 1998b, 66-67).

1917 marked the beginning of a new era, that for many meant unfathomable suffering and the wounds that would never heal. Fr. Sergiy was convinced that, "all the untruths of the fallen old world will be burned by the horrible Fire of retribution". After the revolution Christians faced a new reality where there was no outer hope or support other than Christ.

<sup>2</sup> In the 1920s, Vasiliy Savelyev, together with his wife Lydiya, were students at the Institute of the Word, where the famous philosophers Nikolai Berdyaev and Ivan Ilyin taught. They were also lucky enough to hear the priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Pavel Florenskiy, who was shot by the Bolsheviks in 1937.

Only in Christ could the people find true freedom and be saved. These were extremely difficult times when personal choice, commitment and responsibility for one's actions were of utmost importance.

In 1925, Vasilii Savelyev made a crucial decision that would forever change his life and define his future. A decision to enter priesthood looked almost insane at the time when it became dangerous to openly practice religion. "He was with those persecuted for Christ and Holy Church, he was against the all-powerful oppressors, liars and pharisees" (Bogoslovskiy 1996, 93). In his letters later in his life he wrote about himself and his fellow philosophers, "[...] we had stood inside the church walls not as plain 'parishioners', but as those, holding 'the reigns of power', the power that was bestowed on us through Christ's love. Upon entering the church, we had assumed full responsibility for what awaited us inside" (Sergiy 1998a, 23). Gradually, an Orthodox community was formed from a group of young people, which received a blessing from the confessor of the faith, Archbishop Philip (Gumilevskiy).<sup>3</sup>



*Figure 1. Archimandrite Sergiy (Savelyev) in his youth (Vasily Savelyev)*

### The common path of suffering

Despite obvious differences in their respective spiritual journeys, Fr. Tavriion and Fr. Sergiy share the same historical background, one of the most difficult and often tragic periods in Russia. 1929 is a year of a special significance for both. During the same year many Christians were

<sup>3</sup> Archbishop Philip (Gumilevskiy) (1877-1936) died in prison: September 22, he was killed during the interrogation time, not wishing to sign the text of the false testimony offered by the investigator.

sent to labour camps and the church stood to be annihilated by the Bolsheviks. In the spring of 1929 Fr. Tavrion was ordained Archimandrite and blessed by the Bishop Pavlin (Kroshechkin)<sup>4</sup> a to serve daily Liturgy with the writing, “if it will come to pass” on the antimins (Kostina 2010, 92). While giving his blessing, His Grace said, “they (government officials) are of such an opinion about you, that I reckon, you’re going to be spending your entire life in prison” (Kostina 2010, 31). Soon his prediction came true – in the fall of 1929 Fr. Tavrion was arrested for the first time in the city of Perm. He was charged with “antisoviet propaganda”, but in reality, he succeeded in his opposition to the movement of Obnovlenchestvo, which was organized by the Soviet government to destroy the Russian Orthodox Church from the inside (Kostina 2010, 30-32). Following his arrest Archim. Tavrion was sent to prison then to the GULAG labour camps serving a total of 25<sup>5</sup> years (Bychkov 2007, 131-196; Kostina 2010, 30-94).

1929 became pivotal for Vasilij Saveliev (Archim. Sergiy) and his parish community, many of whom were arrested and sent to the GULAG camps in the North. Fr. Sergiy was sent to the labour camp in Pinyuga, in Saiberia. Later, Fr. Sergiy would call this day the Day the Community was born, “We turned the page, and this new page of our life is called ‘dear home’. It has brought together people not related by blood [...] made them much closer than a blood relation ever could” (Sergiy 1998c, 124). Brothers and sisters of Fr. Sergiy’s community kept the spiritual connection alive through letters to each other and by visiting with each other in exile. While in exile, Vasilij Savelyev came to another important decision. Realizing his role as the spiritual leader of his community and assuming full responsibility for ministering to his flock, he saw it necessary to enter

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<sup>4</sup> Bishop Pavlin (Kroshechkin) was executed in 1937 in the GULAG concentration camp in Siberia. Was canonized in 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Researchers give different time frames; we rely on chronological research done by S. S Bychkov and V. A. Kostina. It appears that Fr. Tavrion referred to his years of illegal (“catacombs”) serving in 1932–1940s when he was talking about his “26 years in the camps and exile”.

*Figure 2.* After the arrest of half of the community members. 1029 from the archives of the community of Fr. Sergius (Savelyeva).



monasticism. As his new monastic name, he chose Sergiy in honour of Rev. Sergiy Radonezhskiy.<sup>6</sup>

At this time the best of the clergy found themselves in the camps. Life in the soviet labour camps was full of torture. It meant spiritual trials for inmates, many of whom found their faith and grew strong in it. It was while in confinement that Frs. Tavrion and Sergiy fully understood the meaning of their calling to priesthood. They saw the depth of humanity crisis; however, their faith that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God remains ineradicable. Archim. Tavrion wrote later about this time, “I was burning inside with desire to serve daily Liturgy. It was there, in prison, that I felt people’s desperate need for our prayers, how they thirst for our sacrifices” (Bichkov 2007, 49).

Upon his release, Fr. Sergiy was secretly ordained into priesthood<sup>7</sup> which allowed him to conduct church services in secret at home, with just the members of his community in attendance. It was not until 1947 that he started to serve openly at the Bogoyavlenskiy Cathedral in Moscow

<sup>6</sup> His wife Lydiya Savelyeva took monastic tonsure six months later with the name Seraphima in honor of Rev. Seraphim Sarovskiy.

<sup>7</sup> The consecration of Fr. Sergiy was secretly committed by the Bishop Marijskiy Leonid (Antoshchenko), a holy martyr who was shot by the Bolsheviks on January 7, 1938.

(Savelyev 1998b, 120). In his manuscript *Razoreniye* (Devastation)<sup>8</sup>, he described what he had witnessed there, “Our churches are cold, gloomy and desolate, and the feeling of doom is overwhelming” (Sergiy 1971, 163).

As Fr. Sergiy was aware that ministering in the churches was practically non-existent, the people had no one to turn to for spiritual counselling. Seeing that, Fr. Sergiy began to seek every opportunity to establish direct lines of communication with his parishioners, whom he treated with endless compassion and love. Fr. Sergiy’s unrelenting service to God and his flock was what truly stands him apart from his fellow priests who had succumbed to the existing order of things. His comprehensive services were so different from others that Patriarch Alexis once jokingly likened him to a famous rebel Pugachev. His opposition to the Chief priest of the church ended in Fr. Sergiy’s transfer to Pokrov of the Theotokos Church on Lyshchikof st., where he served for a short period of time. Next, he was transferred to The Transfiguration Church on Bogorodskiy st. in Moscow where he started rebuilding the church that was badly damaged by fire. The repairs not sanctioned by the government angered local authorities. In 1959 Fr. Sergiy was banned from serving publicly in the church.

In 1956 Archim. Tavrion was released from serving his second term in the labour camp, followed by exile in Kazakhstan. In 1957 he was appointed a spiritual leader to the Glinskiy monastery, the place where he had first started his own spiritual journey. Much had changed since. His enthusiastic effort to revive the old, pre-revolutionary monastic order, with its focus on ministering to the people in need of spiritual guidance was met with great opposition and resentment from the brotherhood at the Monastery. Eventually Fr. Tavrion was forced to leave and the next few years he spent moving from one place to another. In 1958-1961 he served in Ufa where, like Fr. Sergiy, he started repairing the church building destroyed by the Bolsheviks. And, just like his fellow priest in Moscow,

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<sup>8</sup> The original title of the manuscript was *Razoreniye tserkvi* (The Ruin of the Church). The manuscript was written by Fr. Sergiy in 1971. Not published yet.

Fr. Tavrion had paid the price for his rightful endeavour. He was removed from public church service in the midst of Khrushchev's persecutions (Kostina 2010, 114-115).

Orthodox Church at this time was tormented by the hostile Soviet government on the outside and by the inner fractured church structure. Both 'importune' priests were constantly relocated from one church to another. Persecution and relocations notwithstanding, they invariably found themselves amidst the gathering of people desperate to hear the Word of God and candid Christian sermon. Both priests were always fearlessly seeking the opportunity to preach to as many people as possible even though they were prevented by the authorities and denied the opportunity to preach openly for a long time.

In the early 1960s, Fr. Tavrion and Fr. Sergiy were reinstated to public church service. Thus, began a new, more peaceful period in their respective ministry. In 1961 Fr. Sergiy is appointed a Chief Priest of the Pokrov of the Theotokos Church in Medvedkovo district of Moscow, where served until his repose in 1977. In 1962 Fr. Tavrion took a position at Yaroslav archdiocese. (Kostina 2010, 118) under the governance of the Archbishop Nikodim (Rotov).<sup>9</sup> His next and last transfer happened in 1969 when the Fr. Leonid (Polyakov),<sup>10</sup> Archbishop of Riga and Latvia invited him to serve as a spiritual leader at Spaso-Preobrazhenskiy convent near Yelgava, Latvia. Fr. Tavrion graciously accepted. His time at convent where he entered a blessed repose in 1978 proved to be the most rewarding and fulfilling of his life as a priest.

### Final period of service to God and people

Archim. Tavrion and Archim. Sergiy clearly saw through the lies and deception that permeated both the Soviet society and the church. The preaching alone did not work any longer, the truth has been constantly

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<sup>9</sup> Nikodim (Rotov) (1929-1978), Archbishop of Yaroslavl from 1960 to 1963.

<sup>10</sup> Metropolitan Leonid (Polyakov) (1913-1990) in 1963-64 was archbishop of Yaroslavl and Rostov, where he met Archimandrite Tavrion (Batozkiy).



distorted to fit the current political ideology. As witnesses of Christ and His love they needed to set an example of how to live it out in reality. Fr. Tavrion spoke of this in one of his sermons,

“Christ said, ‘You are the light of the world, you are the salt of the world!’ Don’t you think he meant, go around talking fancy empty words, – no, that’s not what he meant. It is how you live your life and what you do that will tell people about your faith! It is time to take an action. Stop wallowing in do-nothingness” (Tavrion 2019, 344).

When he first arrived at the convent, Archim. Tavrion found the place in a state of disrepair. He initiated the renovations and actively participated in all of the construction projects: the renovation of the two churches, building of the dining hall, and guest rooms for pilgrims. It has to be noted that most of the construction at the monastery was forbidden by the government at the time. In just one year the small convent in the Jelgava woods was welcoming visitors from all over the country. Church services and common prayers were at the centre of the daily routine at the Convent besides work and common meals. Fr. Tavrion served daily Liturgy. He insisted that the faithful partake in the sacrament of Eucharist daily. He firmly believed the daily communion to be a blessed gift as he himself knew it from personal experience. During Summers 150-200 people received communion daily. The Eucharist, the Cup of Christ was always the most important part of his sermons, however he never forgot to address the needs of the individuals seeking his counsel. He stressed that conscious participation of the parish community in the Sacraments would lead to spiritual awakening. He called on the faithful to make an effort to overcome any form of schism and discord among themselves. Fr. Georgiy Kochetkov, who had attended the Liturgies at Spaso-Preobrazhenskiy Convent called it a Eucharistic fellowship of people united prayerfully on any given day and enjoying a particular uplift (Kochetkov 1998, 67).

The Word of God preached in the Sermons facilitated the process of spiritual awakening, but also the very nature of life at the convent had a

powerful healing effect on people. Although the congregation of parishioners was constantly changing there, people did establish spiritual bonds. Always prioritizing individual spiritual awakening, Archim. Tavrion attempted to convey to the others his personal experience of living as a 'son of God' which he felt deeply and intimately as well as to teach others the importance of living in communion with each other and the loved ones. He believed that the Cup of Salvation and gratitude are the saving grace that should guide every Cristian and the Church itself on the path of renewal and rebirth (Kostina 2008, 92). Every man has to learn to live a Godly, conscientious, gracious life which would only happen if the Eucharistic spirit penetrated all aspects of one's life.

"What is our personal life about? It is about our [...] walking towards God, step by step, minute by minute... So, if we have to keep walking towards God and we are going to live an eternal life, we have to keep thinking about it and keep preparing ourselves and try to see it all clearly. So, one can see very clearly that one has nothing. That is why one has to partake of these Sacraments, so one can wash away one's sins and be reborn and grow stronger in one's spirit one has to come to this mystery" (Tavrion 2019, 340).

Archim. Sergiy also started to renovate the church and gather the parish community as soon as he was allowed to conduct public church services. The news of his return quickly spread all over Moscow bringing back his old parishioners and many new ones, mainly intelligentsia who were curious to hear his sermons. In his words, 'fake Christianity' was the worst of all the evils befallen humanity in the 20th century, told his daughter Katya Savelyeva. He constantly called on Christians to witness their faith in a new world. To live out the 'Christ's Gospel' was the goal and the meaning of Christian life. Relationships between the Orthodox church and the Soviet government, its place in the Soviet society, personal freedom, responsibilities, and accountability, caring for those in need, were crucial issues that faced Christians in the Soviet society. Fr. Sergiy stressed in his sermons,

“Our Holy Church has suffered greatly at the hands of smarmy, lying hypocrites looking to get inside the church walls, who then proceeded to torture the church’s very soul, thus making a Christian heart to long for the atheistic government devoid of ingratiating adulation of the clergy. We’re all one people, and we need atheists, we need these atheists to hold the whip, which they would use to strike the Christians lest they drift away from Christ and His way” (Sergiy1998b, 28-29).

Fr. Sergiy did not justify the Soviet regime, but called on Christians to return to life according to the Gospel. He believed that the civil authorities cannot prevent the faithful or the clergy from practicing the most important Christian values, which are truth, honesty and love.

The shocking truths spoken by Fr. Sergiy were not accepted by all of his listeners. A well-known poet, O. Sedakova visited Fr. Sergiy’s church in Medvedkovo in 1976. She shared her memories:

“The rumour was going around Moscow, that everyone should go to Medvedkovo to listen to this remarkable priest speak. And a few from the intelligentsia, all the ‘churchy’ ones, rushed there. And what they heard, they found insulting. The priest in his sermon justified the government and condemned the church. That sounded radical. People were saying, ‘He is a traitor, he makes excuses for the government and blames the church.’ They did not understand. I knew what he meant. Everyone who came with me that first time never came back” (Sedakova 2001).

Christian fellowship among the members of the church community invariably remained a priority for Fr. Sergiy, “the life of a separate individual does not carry the same value as it does when he is one of the members of the community, when he’s one with his church family, in unity with the others, the individual’s life is extraordinary and significant” (Sergiy 1998a, 12). Fr. Sergiy saw the fellowship in the church as a way to revive Christian parish community that would bring people together not only in prayer but in their life outside the church, help them establish spiritual bonds and lay friendships imbued with Christian values. He was convinced that only that sort of Christian unity would ultimately lead to

the spiritual awakening of every individual and society as a whole. This type of Christian community was not imaginary. Fr. Sergiy was describing the parish at his church where people came together to pray, fought many challenges, and grew into a community. His fervent sermons were inspired by the fifty years of life of his parish community where Christ's love triumphed at the end. His hope was that their example would be replicated by the others.

The weekday services were attended exclusively by the established parishioners and Fr. Sergiy's spiritual children, all of whom he knew personally. This allowed him to address them directly, "My dearest, you often hear me tell you things you don't otherwise hear. Don't you forget that I am a Christian? This means I am not put in here to tell you what can be heard out on the streets. I'm put in here to speak from the heart, and what the Lord inspires me, your humble servant, to tell you" (Sergiy 1998b, 65). He gave his flock practical advice on how to incorporate their Orthodox faith into their life outside the church, seamlessly switching to preaching the Gospel and explaining the good news of our Saviour Jesus Christ being always among us mysteriously, acting on our behalf. His godson Sergey Andriyaka<sup>11</sup> told that it was not unusual for Fr. Sergiy's sermon to be delivered as a fatherly talk to his child and continue for more than an hour. As it was witnessed by those in attendance, the church would become absolutely still, and people felt uniquely connected with each other. The preacher was connected to people through his word that emerged within the people in the church (Sergiy 1998b, 212-213). Fr. Sergiy believed that we were all connected, that we must care for each other, be charitable and compassionate, "[..] our common goal is saving each and every one. We are all one people, we are all connected and shouldn't let each other out of each other's sight, we all have a calling that unites us and makes our lives a sacred act" (Sergiy 1998b, 72).

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<sup>11</sup> Sergey Nikolaevich Andriyaka, currently Narodniy Artist of Russia. In childhood and youth he spent many time next to Archimandrite Sergius (Savelyev). With his assistance, a book of Sermons and a third edition of the book "A Long Road [..]" were published.

Both Frs. Tavrion and Sergiy viewed ‘Sobornost’ as one of the key elements in the process of spiritual awakening. They tried to include every parishioner in the church service by encouraging them to sing and pray together. The Epistle was read in modern Russian language, Bible studies were offered to people to further educate them about the Scripture. All that was done in an attempt to convince people to lead their everyday life based on Christ’s message as outlined in the Gospels, which could only be achieved if people put an effort into reading the Bible regularly.

“A person without Scripture is hollow, he has no substance. That is why, brothers and sisters, the time has come for you all to put some honest work into reading the Scripture. Cannot do without it. Without it you’ll lose yourself and if you lose yourself, you’ll not know what you’re doing. Is human life really that worthless?! [...] All the riches in the world will be revealed to you if you work hard to find and realize your self-worth, – this is the Gospel. Let’s put some work into reading the Scripture and we shall find the source of the river of life within ourselves” (Tavrion 2019, 341).

Courage and the deep sense of personal freedom so characteristic of both priests’ service were the result of their steadfast dedication to their pastoral ministry. They both treated people with utmost care and compassion. Everyone seeking their advice could always expect to be heard. Many in need of spiritual advice came to see Fr. Tavrion at the convent in Yelgava. Sister Olimpiada,<sup>12</sup> who served as Fr. Tavrion’s personal secretary said that he had daily appointments with the pilgrims, provided them with spiritual support.<sup>13</sup> Fr. Sergiy and his parish community lived in Kirсановка. This place on the 101 km mark from Moscow became “the center for spiritual awakening”, where the visitors were immersed in the atmosphere of love and spiritual freedom (Sergiy 1998b, 212-213).

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<sup>12</sup> Sister Olimpiada (Ius) (1924-2019) was by the side of Archimandrite Tavrion (Batozskiy) during the last years of his ministry. Was buried in the cemetery of the Spaso-Preobrazhenskiy convent, not far from the Fr. Tavrion’s grave.

<sup>13</sup> Audio interview with sister Olympiada (Ius) was recorded by the author on September 22, 2013.



*Figure 3.* Archim. Tavrion (Batozsky) in the Spaso-Preobrazhensky convent. Second from the left is Mother Olympiada (Ius), Fr. Tavrion's assistant.  
Personal archive of M. Olympiada (Ius) (1924-2019)

However, this strife for spiritual freedom was resented by the mainstream clergy in the 1960-1970s. Historian S. Bychkov commented, "All those who had suffered through camps and prison had been inoculated against conformity. But they were a minority" (Bychkov 2007, 238). Not everyone was able to withstand the atrocities and inhumane conditions of the labour camps, many, including the clergy broke down under torture. But those who survived in the name of Jesus Christ and His church, upon their release could not live the way they did prior to their imprisonment.

Frs. Tavrion and Sergiy braved through the lies and persecution of the godless authorities. Often their efforts were met with suspicion inside the church. Fr. Tavrion's missionary work was resented by the nuns. One of them was assigned to keep track of all the arriving pilgrims as part of the organized attempt to control his activities at the convent. Fr. Sergiy was not always supported by his parishioners at his church in Medvedkovo. He had high hopes for his small community to become the nucleus of the entire parish community providing guidance to newcomers. He was sorely

disappointed. In 1975 his spiritual daughter and one of the leaders was interrogated by the government officials. She succumbed under pressure and denounced Fr. Sergiy in her statement. Soon after He had suffered his third heart attack and died not long after that. In spite of that his honest and sincere sermon lived long after his death.

### Common and unique features in Frs. Tavrion's and Sergiy's ministry

How are the two priests alike? What is so unique about their message and what makes them stand out among their contemporaries? First and foremost, it is the fiery passion with which they served, those around them felt as if, "the land they walked on was aglow". They led by their own example, proving that spiritual awakening was possible. Both priests looked for ways to address each person in their parish individually, in accordance with their personal needs at a time when church activities were strictly controlled by the government, and all the priests closely watched, making any missionary work nearly impossible. Frs. Tavrion and Sergiy's message to the faithful was to spread the news of the Christ Resurrected and to bear witness to His Gospel of Salvation. They also constantly reminded people of their Christian obligation to show compassion not only to their loved ones but everyone they encountered in their life.

The spiritual awakening according to both priests would only happen if people's lives were rooted in the Gospel and its principles. It was up to every Christian to personally ensure that the spiritual awakening occurred both in the Church and in the society. Despite being mystical in nature and containing ascetic instruction the sermons always called to action. Different life and their personal spiritual experience resulted in different priorities Fr. Tavrion and Fr. Sergiy put forward when ministering to their flock. To Fr. Tavrion the Eucharist was essential in the process of the individual spiritual awakening that in its turn would lead to the spiritual awakening of the church and society. His every sermon was about the Cup of Christ, its healing power and the way to new life in Christ and the ultimate

Salvation (Tavrion 195, 5; Vilygert 2001, 127; Lepyochina 2013, 74). Fr. Sergiy' focus was on the parish community and Christian fellowship of its individual members that he saw as true and elemental to the church. He preached, "We entered a second semi centenary, and do you see a true Christian? Show me one and we shall all follow this, Christian. We cannot see one, but there is one among us. [...] Really, there is nothing better in the whole God's world than to be called a Christian. But where is one? Our spirits are starved and thirsty for You, O Lord, please hear me..." (Sergiy 2002, 49). Fr. Tavrion reminded Christians of their calling, "Christians today seem to have forgotten they were created in the image and likeness of God. To be Christian is to be the wonder and the change, be an example the others would want to follow" (Tavrion 2019, 276).

Drawing upon the experience from the life of his parish community and, specifically, its "unity", Fr. Sergiy claimed that Christians should set an example in overcoming any discord and divisiveness, to do away with any schism as shown to us by the Holy Trinity, "Christ did not send his disciples into the world to preach the Gospel to those in power, so they would use it to advance their national governments [...] but, to unite the people in Christ. [...] The Holy Trinity should be a reminder to us that we must never engage in divisive behaviour" (Sergiy 2003, 10).

Spiritual freedom was greatly valued by both priests despite their different priorities. This freedom permeated both of their ministries. In their sermons, they called for spiritual freedom which is supported by moral values. Frs. Tavrion and Sergiy believed that self-centred, selfish love, devoid of the Love of God, will inevitably end in enslavement by the current ideology, making people unaware of their complete and utter dependence on the said ideology.

## Conclusion

Under the stifling circumstances in which the Russian Orthodox church has endured extreme persecution and oppression at the hands of the Soviet/Bolshevik government, the Frs. Tavrion and Sergiy never lost



hope in their relentless pursuit of both the individual and the societal spiritual awakening. They led by personal example, by trying to emulate Christ's Gospel in their daily life.

They implementing 'sobornost' into the church's services by engaging every parishioner in the common prayer, singing and the reading of the Scripture during the service. Both priests prioritized educating their parishioners about the Liturgical services (Catechism) and through Bible studies. Furthermore, both priests called on their parishioners to commit to their Christian values by way of assuming full responsibility for their own actions, as well the world peace. Spiritual awakening would only occur when people start to act out the principles outlined in the Gospel in their daily life. "It is through the sufferings that our soul will be healed", wrote F. Dostoyevskiy. A lot of Russian people and great many clergy suffered through the atrocities of the Bolshevik government in the 20th century. They survived thanks to their unwavering faith in Christ, thus demonstrating to those of us who came after how to overcome fear and remain true to ourselves and our Christian faith. Frs. Tavrion and Sergiy showed us the way always leading us by their own example.

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## THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX COMMUNITY IN THE BALTIC STATES IN 1940-1941 AND 1945-1953: CHANGE OF COMPOSITION, TRADITIONS, RELATIONS WITH AUTHORITIES, AND THE LOCAL POPULATION<sup>1</sup>

*This article considers the undisclosed problem of the changing composition of the Russian, and in a broader context, the Slavic Orthodox community in the Baltic states in the 'first Soviet year' of 1940-1941 and in the post-war period of 1945-1953. The main emphasis is put on a different tradition inherited by the two 'Russian worlds': 'the sub-Soviet one' and 'the pre-revolutionary one'. In addition to purely quantitative changes, attention is paid to the issue of the Holy Sacraments and the relations with the non-Orthodox and the local population including the ones who were Orthodox by faith. Special attention is paid to believing settlers from the Soviet community, who immediately began to identify themselves as Orthodox. The material is based on a wide range of sources: the State Archives of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, archives of the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church, memoirs of eyewitnesses and interviews with them.*

*Keywords: Russians, Orthodox Church, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia*

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The issues of changes in the Russian Orthodox community in the territory of Baltic States in the second half of the last century are closely entwined with the course of the history of this territory in the ‘turbulent XX century’. The Soviet annexation of the Baltic States and further resettlement policy not only led to significant blurring of the ethnic borders of the republics but also to the introduction of new and fresh ‘colors’ to their life, the emergence of new traditions, and everyday ‘rite’ features. Without any doubt, ‘the first’ Soviet year of the mid-1940–mid-1941 introduced only repressions and considerable restrictions on missionary activity in the religious life of the Baltic region. As far as the post-war period is concerned, the first thing that should be mentioned is the formation of a special attitude to the Orthodox Church on the territory of these three republics, in which such factors as more than 25 years of massive atheistic propaganda in the Soviet Union, alongside ‘ritualism’, the confidence in the possibility of being related to the Orthodox Church without attending the church on a regular basis and without partaking of the Holy Sacraments, as well as the *laissez-faire* attitude to the repressions against the clergy and the active laymen, and the closure of churches played a giant role.

It cannot be said that the problem of peculiarities in the perception of life in the Church by the ‘Russian’ population has not drawn the attention of historians before. It should be emphasized that the perception of this problem often depends on the biographical factors of the researcher himself, and, in particular, his ethnic or confessional background, his attitude to the current role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-Soviet space and his assessment of the controversial periods of 1940–1941 and 1944–1991 in the history of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. I would like to note at once that the majority of researchers from the Baltic States are critical towards the actions of the Soviet government related to religious confessions, regardless of their attitude to the role of Orthodoxy in the region, whereas their Russian colleagues among which the remains of the Soviet historiographic tradition can still be seen have a completely opposite opinion on the subject. Here are some concrete illustrative examples.

On the one hand, we can see the modern historians from the Baltic countries that agree to the thesis about a certain kind of merging between the Russian Orthodox Church with the atheistic state and using the biggest confession in the USSR for achieving its political goals by the latter, often to the detriment of the Faith and the Church. Regina Laukaitytė from the Vilnius University has become one of such figures (Laukaitytė, 2019). The Lithuanian researcher puts a special emphasis on such facts of using the Orthodox clergy in the interests of the State as the struggle against the Vatican, and especially the Greek-Catholic Church. These processes were particularly acute in Lithuania as the absolute majority of the republic's population avowed themselves to the Roman Catholic Church. However, it is worth pointing out that the attitude of the secular authorities of interwar Lithuania and, especially, Poland was completely the same towards the Russian Orthodox community: The Orthodox churches were closed, the State interfered in the jurisdictional disputes of the clergy and close attention was paid to representatives of the Catholic and Uniate clergy. Meanwhile, the works German Shlevis and Irina Arefyeva who were close to the modern Vilna-Lithuanian Eparchy are, on the contrary, more like a chronicle of the history of Orthodox parishes, clergy, and believers where the reader's attention is focused on the most complex issues of the post-war times without delving into the subject of merging between the Russian Orthodox Church and the atheistic State (Shlevis, 2005).

A somewhat different plot is typical of Estonian historiography up to this day. The fact is that the issue in the center of consideration by Estonian authors, who are mainly Orthodox priests, is the question of how correct and canonical 'the reunification' with the Russian Orthodox Church was, first of Tallin and Estonian Metropolitan Alexander (Paulus) in March 1941, and then of those Estonian priests who remained on the territory of Estonia in 1944-1945. Archpriest Igor Prekup directs the reader's attention to purely canonical issues in his works justifying the position of Moscow, and according to him, the actions of Metropolitan Alexander (Paulus) during the period of the first independence of Estonia

were wrong (Prekup I., priest. 1998). The events that took place in the first post-war decade are mostly evaluated in terms of forced concessions related to the atheistic state. The works of the priest Andrei Sotsov who belongs to the jurisdiction of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church are on the opposite edge of perception of the events that took place in 1945-1953 in the Orthodox environment of the Estonian USSR (Sotsov A.). This author underlines the rejection of the Moscow church policy by a lot of priests in Estonia, including the Russian ones, among which, for example, is Father Pavel Kalinkin; the Soviet legislation, the new taxing system of parishes, and also the repressions against the clergy and the laymen in 1945-1953, especially during the period of deportation in 1949-1950, became the main motives for the description of the events of 'the apogee of Stalinism' by this author.

As far as Latvia is concerned, it should be noted that the humble critical assessment of events and the recognition of the malignity caused by the anti-religious campaign of the Soviet authorities both in the 'first Soviet year' and in the post-war decade prevail. Most of the fundamental research on the subject was published in the editions of *Orthodoxy in Latvia* and *Orthodoxy in the Baltic* as well as from the pen of the editor-in-chief of these periodicals, Professor of the University of Riga Alexander Gavrilin (Gavrilin (2009); Gavrilin (2013)). Complete studies by the nun Euphrosinya (Sedova) based on reliable sources have recently been published when Metropolitan Veniamin (Fedchenkov) occupied the Riga See, as far as the post-war period is concerned (Evfrosiniya, inok. (G.V Sedova) (2016); Evfrosiniya, inok. (G.V Sedova) (2020)).

As we can see from the above historiographic review, most scientists considered purely factual side of the history of the Russian Orthodox Church on the territory of the Baltic republics in the 'Soviet' period of their history, the issues of Church-State relations and jurisdictions. 'National' problems were most often limited by the review of interwar and wartime periods. As for the Russian Orthodox community in the Baltics, it was studied rather superficially, including the period of 'the first Soviet year' in mid-1940-mid-1941.

It should be noted first that not all 'old Russians', that is, the immigrants and residents of these places who were living in the Baltic countries before the revolution were enthusiastic about the Red Army crossing the border of the Baltic States as the result of the agreements made between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Their attitude towards the Red Army soldiers varied depending on the area, participation/non-participation in the Civil War in Russia or the Liberation Wars in the Baltic countries, their background, etc. Without any doubt, one of the key factors that warned against supporting the new authorities was involvement in religious life. The Soviets, and hence the Red Army were perceived with distrust and apprehension in big cities - Tallinn, Tartu, Riga, etc.

To better understand the attitude of the 'Russian' Orthodox community of the Baltic countries and reaction to Sovietization, let's turn to the testimonies of the actual eyewitnesses. In a conversation with Lyudmila Shelkanova (she was 14 at the time when World War II started), the daughter of deacon Ioann Gonestov living in Latvia and repressed by the Soviet government, the author was able to grasp the description of the Red Army from the 'first Soviet year' as an army of 'ragamuffins', 'poorly dressed people' bearing a different cultural tradition (Interview with Lyudmila Shshelkanova. 13 December 2016). The emphasis on a large number of Asian-looking people among the Red Army soldiers is especially striking, as it was something unusual back then for the Russian inhabitants of the Baltic as well. Oddly enough, Tamara Milyutina, the widow of the renowned religious and public figure of the interwar Estonia Ivan Lagovsky, who was also repressed in the 'first Soviet year', practically repeated the same characteristics word by word in a documentary dedicated to the history of Estonia and filmed by the Museum of Occupations in Estonia.

Another good testimony concerning the soldiers of the Red Army can be found in the memoirs of Archpriest Georgy Beningsen. He noticed that in 1940 certain priests and believers wanted to see the soldiers of the Red Army as 'their people' but they were afraid to make a mistake and avoided expressing their admiration about the Sovietization of the Baltic

States. The disappointment from that 'first encounter' was incredibly fast (Benigsen G., priest. 2002, 238).

Interrogations of the clergy and believers became one of the most distinguishing features of 'the first Soviet year'. The future Archimandrite Alexy (Chernai) recalled his priesthood in Lithuania at that time as strictly negative. The Archimandrite recollected how a recently interrogated believer who sewed his cross into his blouse came to him. The priest himself, forced to work on the railroad under the conditions of the Sovietization, was interrogated every night and called 'a drone' and 'a parasite' (Alexy (Chernai) 1981, 132). The representatives of the Soviet government and its punitive system openly declared that the clergy violated the Soviet Constitution and were the public enemy. Detachment from Church life became the symbol of the époque. Former active believers, especially young people who had actively joined the Komsomol, turned their backs to priests. In fact, life in 1940-1941 turned into the common anticipation of detention both for the clergy and the laymen. Bargain with a conscience was an option for the salvation; it presupposed voluntary laicization and transition to a civilian profession.

To be fair, it should be noted that a number of Baltic believers cherished certain hopes for the Soviet authorities established in the Baltics and the Russian Orthodox Church. In this case, it is important to pay attention to the traditions of the Orthodox believers who lived on the territories bordering on the USSR and were dissatisfied with the course of the church authorities that was purely 'national', in their opinion. The parishioners of the Forty Martyrs Church in Petseri (Pechery) in Estonia were among the most zealous adherents of this position. The parish council of the church was dominated by opponents of the calendar and other reforms in the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church. The period of twenty years of independence was characterized by them as a forceful transition from canonical subordination to the church authorities in Moscow to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. A political context was added to a purely ecclesiastical explanation: believers declared that they wanted to see their future under the sun of 'Stalin' constitution and live in 'the



great USSR' (Personal archive of Alexander Dormidontov. Extract from the minutes of the Parish Council meeting of Petseri Forty Martyrs Church of August 4, 1940 № 5.). A similar position was expressed in the criticism of the Metropolitan of Tallinn and Estonia Alexander (Paulus) and his protege Deanery Archpriest of Petseri Nikolai Raag. During the years of Nazi occupation, representatives of local self-government more than once reminded the 'Moscow party' of 'lovely letters' to Metropolitan Eleutherius (Bogoyavlenskij) of Lithuania (the last bishop in Europe, who in the 1930s remained loyal to the church leadership in Moscow) and Bishop Ioann (Bulin), the Bishop of Petseri removed by the Estonian church authorities.

'The first Soviet year' in the Baltics wasn't marked with a broad resettlement policy. Local Russian Orthodox believers rather saw their fellow countrymen who had arrived from the territories on the other side of the border as the image of workers of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, party and state leaders, teachers, officers, and soldiers of the Red Army. Definitely, it was difficult to meet people who had sympathy with Orthodoxy among these groups. Moreover, the absolute majority of these people took a direct part in the persecution of the Orthodox Church. That process was, however, interrupted by the German attack on the USSR and the Nazi occupation that followed.

The first changes in the life of parishes on the Baltic territory occurred when 'the two worlds' collided in 1943-1944 during the mass emigration of the internal districts of the USSR with the retreating Wehrmacht divisions. Conflicts arose between the priests and the laity who permanently resided in the Baltic territory and refugees, which resulted in the oppression of the latter. Local Orthodox priests couldn't often find the common ground with the 'sub-Soviet' believers and sometimes simply had no wish to do that. Most often, in such cases, those Orthodox priests who were refugees from the 'core' Soviet territory themselves came to the rescue. However, they literally had to be 'rescued' from refugee camps and sought to join temporary Internal Missions (more on this: Petrov. 2019).

'Russian' refugees, as seen from the clergy reports, were mostly interested in the divine services that took place on the days somehow connected to the agricultural cycle. Thus, the feast of Saint George the Victorious in Krimulda gathered more believers in the refugee camp due to the fact that the cattle were blessed on that day (most refugees had a rural background) (Latvian National Archive. F. 7469. A. 1. 142. Apr. 87.). Gradually, the evacuated 'sub-Soviet' people were getting familiar with the traditions of the Orthodox people in the Baltic region. They took the most active part in some church events, for example, in memorial services on the occasion of the tragic death of Metropolitan of Lithuania and Vilnius Sergius (Voskresenskij) under unclear circumstances in April 1944.

The situation became completely different after the expulsion of the Nazis from the Baltic countries and the restoration of the Soviet rule there. In this case, I will try to consider each country separately. The overview will start with Lithuania where Orthodoxy was traditionally the religion of the Slavic minority.

Let us turn to the report about the parishes of the Panevezys rural deanery of Vilno Eparchy of January 25, 1945, as an example of the position of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Baltic territory in the first post-war years. This region is fairly illustrative both due to its relative proximity to Latvia and the dominance of the Russian population among the Slavic one. There were ten Orthodox parishes situated in this area at the time of this report. Three more Orthodox parishes were considered to be small in number and were assigned to the parishes nearby. The parishes in this district didn't only have a large number of worshippers but were also situated relatively far from each other (approximately 40-50 km) (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Panevezys Deanery. L.1). The 'problem' of Panevezys district was also its 'surroundings' (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Panevezys Deanery. L.1). Most of the populations were adherents of Roman Catholicism, and a small percentage of the local residents belonged to the Old-Believers Bezpopovtsy. According to the report, most of the local Orthodox showed unswerving fidelity to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The spirit of the times was the appearance of 'patriotic work' in the life of the parish. As seen from the text of the report:

"Patriotic work was conducted among Orthodox believers by the clergy which was expressed in appeals to defend the Motherland. It should be mentioned that all Russians liable for military service joined the Red Army to defend their Motherland at the first call, while the rest of the Russian population took an active part and supported the Soviets. At the same time, the part of the Lithuanian population under the influence of German fascist agitation started to organize nationalistic fascist Lithuanian gangs" (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Panevezys Deanery. L.1-1-app.).

It is particularly remarkable that the main stress in the report is put on the fact that the Russian population didn't support national underground organization in any respect and, on the contrary, participated in its 'extermination'. The report also contained information about the difficult inter-ethnic situation in the district. In the area of Utena and Ukmerge districts, the facts of robberies and murders of the pro-Soviet Slavic population had been reported. It is noted that Russians from the surrounding area left their homes and moved to Utena. Special attention is paid to the fact that similar incidents also took place in other parishes but to a lesser extent (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Panevezys Deanery. L.1-app.-2.). An important point is that the report highlighted that the Russian population kept supporting the Soviet government, particularly in patriotic work, despite all the tensions connected to the interethnic and political clashes. On public holidays commemorating the victories of the Red Army on the fronts of World War II, patriotic events were held which were not supported by the local Catholics.

As far as the purely 'church' problems of the Orthodox parishes of the Panevezys District are concerned, the dean notes, first of all, the lack of funds for the repair of church buildings, the facts of the destruction of some churches during the Nazi occupation, and in some places, there were no utensils for worship.

The report is filled with references to the region's recent past. Thus, the report emphasizes that the wooden church that belonged to the Utena parish was destroyed by 'the Lithuanian fascist authorities' in 1941, as stated in the document, upon the pretext of its state of dilapidation and the danger of its 'self-destruction'. There was also a clergy house in Utena occupied by a local institution. The rural dean asked to petition for the return of this clergy house to the faithful. The lack of the church utensils, liturgical utensils, and vestments was distinctive for all the parishes, according to the report. Also, not all parishes were able to find psalmists (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Panevezys Deanery. L.3).

The year 1945 can be described as the transition time in the life of the Orthodox parishes in the territory of Lithuania. It boils down to the fact that local parishes en masse hadn't been filled with believers from other Soviet republics yet, and the part of the believers who lived there before the outbreak of World War II left Vilnius and its surroundings due to the mass evacuation of the Polish population. The number of worshippers decreased by two-thirds in some churches of the Lithuanian capital. In total, out of 6831 parishioners in Vilnius in 1943, 4293 people remained. In the Cemetery Church of the city, the number of parishioners reached up to a thousand people at the beginning of the 1940s, and dropped to 250 in 1945 (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius Deanery. L.2).

The parishes of the Vilnius Deanery were literally called 'the small islands' of Orthodoxy among the total number of non-Orthodox where Catholics and Old Believers-Fedoseevs were dominating. 'Dispersion' was also a problem for the Orthodox population in the region. The parishes were situated at a huge distance of tens of kilometers from each other in the territory of the deanery. These factors contributed to the lack of unity among the Orthodox which sharply distinguished them from other confessions including Old Believers. Moreover, even the Orthodox families were sometimes the case where only one spouse was Orthodox and the rest including minor children were Catholics. Such factors played a

negative role in Vilnius itself. The matter is that mixed families that consisted of ethnic Poles moved to Poland taking their Orthodox family members with them (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius deanery. L.2-3). There were big parishes in the deanery, and they included (as in Švenchenis) up to 15 settlements the distance between which was 40-50 kilometers. In several regions, former Orthodox Christians, in particular immigrants from the Brest district, massively converted to Catholicism which resulted in the appearance of an 'Orthodox Church in a Catholic village'. Archpriest Luka Golod, one of the most prominent Lithuanian priests in the period of the interwar occupation of the Vilnius region by Poland who was against the transition of the local Orthodox to the Polish Orthodox Church, pointed out the following:

“Territorial dispersion and estrangement of parishioners is the main negative factor that impedes creative pastoral work and often places insurmountable barriers to it. The distance prevents the pastor from maintaining constant contact with the whole flock and thereby affecting the development and direction of religious life.” (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius Deanery. L.1-app.).

According to the report of Luka Golod, the low attendance of the church is the sad consequence of this conclusion. Already at that time, the Orthodox Church faced the phenomenon of church attendance by a part of parishioners only once or twice a year on great feasts. Father Luka explained it by the distance between churches and some settlements where the believers lived. In addition, permanent living next to the Catholic population left its special imprint. And if, in some cases, it became the cause of the dramatic escalation of interethnic and inter-confessional clashes; 'dissolving' of the Orthodox in 'the Catholic world' was the reverse of the coin. However, a couple of years later, the opposite examples were recorded. Thus in 1945, three conversions to Orthodoxy were registered in connection with 'marriage' in the Vilnius deanery (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius Deanery. L.3).

The Soviet regime left its imprint on the life of the local Orthodox believers. Thus, among the laity especially in the provinces, it was possible to meet the Orthodox who deviated from the traditional confession and communion with the Sacrament of the Eucharist on Christmas and Great Lent. These 'metamorphoses' could be mostly explained by the person's belonging to the State officials or the family of State officials. Parishioners, particularly in the capital of the Lithuanian SSR, started asking not to register the facts of confessions or Holy Communion, especially in the largest parish of Vilnius - the Holy Spirit Monastery. The clergy partly associated it with the decline in 'the moral character' of the parishioners during the war.

Were the Orthodox priests expecting 'the immigrants'? Referring to the above-mentioned report of January 25, 1946, we can conclude that they definitely were. Father Luka openly remarked: "Nevertheless, this decline will be filled to a certain extent by newly coming Orthodox Christians from other Soviet republics. Christians who often attend divine services but unfortunately don't take an active part in parish life yet." (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius Deanery. L.2-2-app.). Baptism became one of the first forms of activity among believing immigrants. In his report of 1945, Archpriest Luka Golod constantly noted that the number of baptisms raised in almost all parishes of the Vilnius deanery in 1945, especially compared to the dramatic fall of those who wanted to do the Crowning or carry out the rite of burial of their relatives. This was explained as follows: "...many families from the Soviet Union arrived in Vilna with unbaptized children that decided to be baptized here" (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius Deanery. L.4-app.).

In a sense, the presence of immigrants in the Vilnius deanery could also inspire hope for the activation of mandatory patriotic work. The reports expressed more and more vividly the idea that rural residents, although having higher income, remain indifferent to a lot of Church needs including mandatory contributions to patriotic needs. In big cities, first of all in Vilnius itself, the situation was the complete opposite: having low

income, the believers gladly responded to the call of the clergy (the latter also actively donated to 'patriotic needs'). These facts could probably explain why Vilnius churches were equipped with all the necessary things compared to the ones in provinces. The financial standing of the Orthodox priests also varied depending on their area of residence. In town, the clergy could make ends meet somehow, whereas, in the rural area, the main source of income for the pastor's family was the household plot. In general terms, contributions for patriotic needs in the territory of Lithuania in 1945 were as follows. In the Vilnius Deanery, 8330 rubles were donated for military needs, 19,712 rubles were donated to the fund for helping families and invalids of the Patriotic War, and 21,200 rubles were contributed to the IV State Loan. In the Kovno Deanery for the same three categories, the amounts were as follows: 11382-13022-1750; in Shavel-sky - 4514-7146-15250, and in Panevezys: 3258-5990-12300 (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius deanery. L.9.).

Another point that well characterizes the state of affairs in the Vilna deanery: out of 15 parishes, the absolute majority of both priests and deacons graduated from the Vilna Seminary, that is, they received religious education either in the pre-revolutionary or interwar periods. Some of the clergymen were graduates of the famous Pastoral-theological courses that worked on the territory of Monastery of the Holy Spirit during the Nazi occupation and were created on the initiative of the Metropolitan of Vilnius and Lithuania Sergius (Voskresenskij). Only a small group of the clergy were the involuntary 'immigrants' from the RSFSR who left their homes along with the retreating Germans but refused or didn't have time to evacuate further to the West with Wehrmacht. We have already written about the brightest of them, a native of the Oryol region, Father Alexander Danilushkin (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkvivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius deanery. L.5-7.).

In the first half of 1946, the Orthodox clergy of Lithuania had a chance to 'better' get to know their new parishioners who started coming from neighboring regions en masse. According to the deans, one of the main dangers was 'the susceptibility' of the Russians from 'the USSR' to

the Catholic propaganda: 'In this sense, many Russians coming from the central regions of the USSR are the susceptible element due to their religious ignorance. The main reason for this grave circumstance is the weak and superficial acquaintance of Russian people with their native religion, they often can't distinguish Orthodox churches and divine services from those of Roman Catholics and completely don't know the difference between Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Hence, Russian people who want to satisfy their religious needs often turn to the nearest church to perform religious services, especially if the Catholic priest speaks Russian and can convince that there is no difference between Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism. So, it often happened that Russians, due to their ignorance, baptized their children in a Catholic church and only found out later that it was "a Polish priest, as they put it, and then the Orthodox priest had to re-baptize their children" (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius deanery. L.11-11-app.). Orthodox pastors noted that 'missionary' work of the kind was only carried out by Catholics, for example, Fedosevtsy were reluctant to attract potential adepts from these immigrants. The Baptist community in Vilnius behaved in the same manner (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius deanery. L.11-app.).

By 1946, the radical change in the composition of parishes took place. According to the reports of rural deans, up to 50-80% of 'the old' (!) parishioners left for Poland with their families. It's not difficult to guess that they were replaced by immigrants from 'the USSR' (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius deanery. L.11-app.). 'New parishioners' blended in parish life very slowly and had no particular interest in it. An interesting characteristics, reflected in one of the reports, described such believers as 'rather worshippers than parishioners.' For that reason, the clergy regarded uniting and consolidation of such people for turning them into 'the united Orthodox family' as their main task.

Another important feature for the life of Orthodox immigrants was their fear of being 'registered' as a believer. The most remarkable case took place in the Nicholas Church in Vilnius in 1945. For three months, the



rector of the church kept asking people, even during sermons, to sign in a special parish list. As a result, after some time, there were 29 people on the list, and 21 of them were “old” parishioners, that is, they attended the church in the interwar and wartime. At the same time, many times more people, who were afraid of their own self-identification as Orthodox, were present at the services (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius deanery. L.12).

However, there were also positive moments in the resettlement policy of the Soviet government. Among these factors, priests named the increasing number of people who were fasting during Great Lent in the territory of Vilnius and its surroundings. The total amount of ‘worshippers’, despite their unwillingness to be ‘legalized’ (there is an imbalance between the number of parishioners and those who attend church on church feasts and Sundays), also increased even after a bigger part of the old parishioners moved to Poland (Lietuvos staciatikiu arkivyskupijos archyvas. Box. Vilnius deanery. L.12.).

Thus, in 1945-1946 there was a kind of ‘accommodation’ between the Orthodox who arrived in the territory of Lithuania from the ‘core’ territory of the USSR. Many rites and the general attitude to Orthodoxy of these people literally shocked Orthodox priests in Lithuania. But due to the ‘old parishioners’ departure to Poland, the clergy had to face a new reality and tried to adapt to the needs and wishes of the new parishioners. Used to concealing their religiosity at the pre-war time, the neophytes rushed to churches ardently baptizing their children. In this case, ‘worshippers’ also ‘covered’ another important ‘service’ of the clergy, that is, participation in raising money for patriotic needs. Unlike the old parishioners, they clearly understood the reasons for such ‘donations’. Due to their ignorance of Orthodox traditions, many immigrants fell victim to ‘the Catholic’ propaganda, as they often did not understand the differences in the liturgical practice of Catholics and Protestants. Among the old parishioners, certain concerns about their open religiosity could be observed, especially in rural areas. In this case, the great influence of escalating and aggravated interethnic contradictions was high, as, in Lithuania,

the impact of the undeclared war between the nationalistic underground and the Soviet government could be sensed to the greatest extent. According to the official reports, many Orthodox regarded the fighters against the new authorities as ‘Lithuanian fascist bandits’. Naturally, in response to such an attitude, they got distrust both from the representatives of Resistance themselves and from their non-Orthodox neighbors. Of course, such an attitude was partly transferred to the immigrants.

The authorities also played a significant part in settling the life of the believing settlers in the Baltics. Conflict situations between the representatives of the Orthodox Church and the authorities concerning church property became very frequent. Thus, one of the most famous priests of the Lithuanian capital, Archpriest Joseph Dzichkovsky, complained that in 1945 the police (militia) took away the parish house from the Znamensky parish, in which the Poles who left the city had previously lived (the house had belonged to the community since its construction, that is, since 1904) (Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybes Archyvas (LCVA). F. R-238. Ap.3. B. 2. L. 10.).

In the areas that used to be the territories of serious conflicts, such as Klaipeda (Memel) and its surroundings, the Orthodox population was also coming from the central regions of the USSR. Already in September 1945, Archpriest Ioann Levitsky wrote to Archbishop of Vilna and Lithuania Korniliy (Popov) that 100 Russian families had arrived in Klaipeda (LCVA. F. R-238. Ap.3. B. 2. L. 11.). Based on this, the priest drew a conclusion that 9 thousand new parishioners had appeared in town and their religious needs couldn’t be satisfied. At the same time, there were also Protestant churches in town and their parishioners had left Klaipeda. The way out was seen in the transfer of one of the Lutheran churches to the Orthodox. Archpriest Levitsky visited Klaipeda in person in order to talk to the believing immigrants, but this meeting was forbidden by the chairman of the local city executive committee Viktoras Bergas who stated that bringing up any issue of registering a new community should be resolved through the local Commissioner of the Council for the Russian Orthodox Church (LCVA. F. R-238. Ap.3. B. 2. L. 58-59.). The

registration of the church, however, dragged on until 1947, also due to the unwillingness of the local authorities to have an Orthodox church in a 'strategic' (in a Soviet sense) town. It is remarkable that immigrants who used to live in such Russian regions as Leningrad, Kalinin, and others were included in the church council. It should be added that a certain parity and even a more favorable attitude towards the Orthodox church than towards Catholics or Uniates existed on the side of the authorities during the first post-war period in Lithuania. The modern Lithuanian researcher Regina Laukaitytė made the most vivid statement on the subject:

"The directives coming from the DROC Council in 1944–1949 engaged the Lithuanian Orthodox Diocese in active participation in the transformation of this new Soviet republic. The diocese, on the other hand, was unable to compete with the influence of the dominant Catholic Church even weakened by the persecution from the regime. In addition, the leadership of the Lithuanian SSR wasn't interested in strengthening the position of Orthodoxy at all. It wasn't oriented at the post-war policy of CPSU but used the experience of the Bolsheviks gained in the 1920s–1930s in its confessional policy" (Laukaityte, 2019, 166–167.).

In the first post-war decade, Latvia was characterized by the change of 'the ethnic' map of Orthodox believers. Thus, if in the 1930s a special emphasis was put on the fact that Latvian Orthodox priests served in Riga, while during the period when the 'great-power' Metropolitan Veniamin (Fedchenkov) was ruling the Riga Eparchy (Veniamin Fedchenkov became 'the Soviet patriot during World War II and came back to his country from the USA after the war) the number of Orthodox Latvians was decreasing. As far as the deeds of Metropolitan Veniamin during his rule of the Riga see are concerned, there are different, even completely opposite opinions on the subject. The nun Euphrosinia (Sedova) became the author of fundamental works on the study of the history of the diocese in 1944–1964, as well as the ministry of Metropolitan Veniamin in Latvia. In general, she is apologetic about the policy of

the famous priest of Latvia. However, one of the most controversial moments of this story is the perception of the Latvian church specifics by such well-known archpastor of quite conservative views. The visits of Metropolitan Veniamin to the parishes played an important role in attracting the inhabitants of Latvia to the Orthodox Church. In her studies, nun Euphrosinia notes that a picture of the poor attendance of Latvian parishes with an increase in the number of Russian parishes appeared before the eyes of the head of the diocese: "The trip also revealed the deplorable fact of the poor attendance of the Latvian parishes. But there were also such communities as in Valmiera where the number of the Russian parishioners was considerable. They confessed in large numbers and were listening to the preaching of the ruling bishop with great attention" (Evfrosiniya, inok. (G.V Sedova) 2016, 63).

To be fair, it should be mentioned that Metropolitan Veniamin strove to defend the rights of the believers who held official positions in the Soviet hierarchical ladder but attended divine services, as well as students and people of higher education, to take part in church life. It is generally known that the Soviet authorities negatively spurned the participation in the parish life of the categories of people who were regarded as the most 'progressive' and, therefore, lived according to the rules of the new rule. Statistics show that almost half of the parishioners of the Latvian SSR consisted of peasants but the number of believing workers, medical workers, and even teachers was gradually increasing. Of course, the resettlement policy was one of the reasons for this. The flip side of this was a still poorly studied phenomenon of 'the spy activists' who detected practicing laymen and reported them to the competent authorities or a commissioner. Penalties both from the side, for example, of the parents who baptized their children, and the removal from registration of Orthodox priests were the result of such an 'activity'.

In July 1950, during a general religious congress dedicated to the centenary of the Riga diocese, the Latvian archpriests Ioann Enyn and Ioann Jansons noticed that the number of Orthodox Latvian believers was steadily declining. Father Ioann Enyn noted that in one parish there used

to be up to 3 thousand believers of Latvian nationality, but now their number does not exceed one or two hundred. Archpriest Ioann Jansons noticed that the total number of Latvian believers in the Latvian SSR dropped to 30 thousand people (Latvijas Valsts arhivs (LVA). F. 1452. apr 2. L. 39).

Another thought that is important for this article was expressed during the congress: Latvian parishes began to lose their strongly pronounced national sentiment due to the resettlement policy of the civil authorities. Father Ioann Enyn paid attention to the fact that Russian immigrant parishioners were dominating in many previously purely Latvian parishes. On the one hand, that fact was described as welcome development due to the relative 'fidelity' of this category of believers to the Orthodox Church. On the other hand, the Latvian population that was surrounded by fellow Lutherans abandoned Orthodoxy (LVA). F. 1452. apr 2. L. 3–4.). Such dynamics will become only stronger over the years.

During the celebrations of anniversaries, it was possible to hear different characteristics of Russian and Latvian Orthodox believers from Metropolitan Veniamin. In 1950, the head of the Riga Diocese announced: "We can't spiritually demand such responsibility from Latvians as from ourselves, as we have 1000 years of history and life behind and they only have a hundred years. We should feel like fathers in front of them. But do we feel?" Metropolitan Veniamin set high hopes on 'the Russian Orthodox folk' that was supposed to help Latvians in strengthening them in their faith. The archpastor especially highlighted the role of women, including elderly women, who attended churches more often than their husbands and brothers, and "are the bearers of such power that could not be broken by any propaganda" (Evfrosiniya, inok. (G.V Sedova) 2016, 83). One can argue about the correctness of such an approach even now. The thing is that Metropolitan Veniamin, being the bearer of the 'pre-revolutionary' tradition', could perceive the Soviet Union as a kind of continuation, or a certain crude reincarnation of the Russian Empire. So, he didn't have such clear boundaries, as if he denied the fact that Latvia was an independent state during the interwar period and had traditions of its own within the Latvian Orthodox Church. One of the most debated

aspects, in this case, was the calendar issue. We are all perfectly familiar with the violent disputes typical of the monks of the Valaam and Petseri (Pechersk) monasteries in the 1920s–1930s. But not all Russian believers were against the reforms carried out in the Latvian, Estonian, and Finnish Orthodox Churches during the interwar period. Lyudmila Schelkanova (Gonestova) who spent the last decades of her life in Saint Petersburg was very negative about the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church did not acknowledge the calendar reforms supported by such Local Orthodox Churches as the Patriarchate of Constantinople or the Romanian Orthodox Church. Besides that, she also underlined the appearance of weird, completely incomprehensible elements of parish life in churches: from the abundance of knitted napkins, and ‘food’ offerings to a priest to the wealthy decoration of iconostases, which, in her opinion, did not correspond to the traditions of the pre-war parish life of Orthodox Latvia tradition (Interview with Lyudmila Shshelkanova. 13 December 2016). Such testimonies seem to be especially priceless due to the fact that the family of Lyudmila Ivanovna was deported, and she ‘missed’ the first interwar decade in the life of believers in the Baltics. The changed appearance of the churches, as well as the new way of life, surprised her, to say the least. In this case, we can talk about a kind of ‘broken tradition’ in the life of Russian believers in the Baltics. Without any doubt, such results were laid, among other things, thanks to the activities of Metropolitan Benjamin (Fedchenkov).

A similar situation arose in the Estonian SSR. There was an official announcement in Estonia about overcoming national clashes typical of the interwar period and the Nazi occupation. On November 29, 1944, Archbishop of Narva Pavel (Dmitrovsky) issued his appeal ‘*To all Orthodox parishes in ESSR with their clergy and the faithful children of the Church*’ that declared that

“the friendly cooperation between the Orthodox Estonians and Russians since the spring of 1941 that achieved moral support in the unity of the Estonian Orthodox Church and the Moscow

Patriarchate didn't fit in with the destructive goals of the enemy who wasn't striving for peoples' unity but was seeking to disunite peoples and cause hostility between them. They managed to destroy the fraternal family, the united Orthodox Church in the Estonian SSR due to the course taken by Metropolitan Alexander of Tallinn who began his self-government of the local Church with the arrival of Germans breaking all the ties with the Moscow Patriarchate from where we got our Orthodox faith and the clergy with whose care and support, we were able to grow and mentally develop into a viable Church" (Rahvusarhiiv (ERAF). F. R-1961. N. 1. Ar. 10. L. 19-19-app.).

However, it was a 'declaration'. In actual fact, the situation in this Baltic republic was much more complicated. To understand it better, we can also refer to the reports of the commissioners for the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church for 1949-1950 (the period of deportations and repressions). At this particular time, when the so-called "Stalinist New Course" changed its direction and began to obtain more and more anti-church character, the reports began to give a real picture of the participation of the local population in the life of the Church. The problem of Lutheran propaganda has become more and more native to Estonian parishes. Very often, both the local Commissioner of the Council for the Russian Orthodox Church, Nefed Karsakov, and the Orthodox pastors themselves, noted the effectiveness of the 'pro-Lutheran propaganda', especially with the influx of immigrants and the increasing perception of Orthodoxy by the Estonians as a 'Russian faith'. The representatives of the Seto people were less prone to this kind of 'temptation'. In assessing the degree of participation of immigrants in the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church and religious rites, the use of statistics will be the most indicative. On Easter 1950, the largest church in the capital of the Estonian SSR, the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, was overcrowded, and another 50% of the worshipers were standing in the square near the church. Another 'Russian' church in Tallinn, the Kazan Church, was also overcrowded, while the 'Estonian' Cathedral of the Transfiguration was attended by

more people than in normal times, but the number of parishioners couldn't be compared with the 'Russian churches' (ERAF. R-1961. N. 2S. A.17. L.31–32.). An important note: among the parishioners there was large and, in some cases, a decisive percentage of young people and, even, the military. That means that in the first five to seven years after the war, the Russian population, who found themselves in new conditions, quite harmoniously 'fit' into the new life and felt more and more comfortable, including in an Orthodox church. This situation is very similar to the Latvian one, especially given that in a number of remote areas, for example, on the island of Vormsi (a place of compact residence of Orthodox non-Slavic origin – Estonians and Swedes), divine services had not been held for several years.

An important aspect of the life of the Orthodox parishes of the Estonian SSR was the deviation from many interwar traditions. This process can be seen especially clearly when analyzing the celebration of Christmas. It is known that a number of Local and Autonomous Orthodox Churches carried out the so-called 'calendar reform' in the 1920s and 1930s. In the case of Estonia, this kind of change in a way 'united' the holiday calendar of the inhabitants of the Lutheran republic with the Orthodox. The Russian Orthodox Church did not acknowledge the 'calendar reform' both due to the conservatism of its episcopate and because it was behind the general trends in Orthodoxy based on endless repressions from the side of the atheistic authorities. In the post-war period, Orthodox Christians in Estonia had to 'return' to the pre-revolutionary tradition again. Let us turn to the report of Commissioner Karsakov from January 6, 1948:

"The religious holiday Christmas, which is celebrated in Estonia by Orthodox Estonians in a new style, fell on a working day – 25 / XII – In 47 AD, in many volosts of Laane (sic) deaneries, believers went to logging and other work, and also the priests there did not perform divine services on that day, so as not to distract the people from their work. In other counties, the peasants celebrated this day" (ERAF. F. R-1961. N. 1. Ar. 12. L. 85.).



The above quote shows that in that part of Estonia, where even after the active resettlement policy of the authorities, Orthodox-ethnic Estonians dominated, the process of 'oblivion' of church life, widespread in the previous decades, began. Russian traditions appeared to replace them, as in neighboring Latvia.

Another interesting detail recorded in the reports of the deans is the statistics on the transition from the Orthodox faith to Lutheranism and vice versa. Most often, the reason for such steps is the marriage with adherents of a different faith. In fact, it turns out that there are more conversions to Orthodoxy, which can also be partly related to the active resettlement policy of the authorities and attempts to erode the ethnic monolith of the republic. Moreover, there were recorded cases of interest in the teachings and traditions of the Orthodox Church on the part of the Lutheran clergy.

Some actions of the Soviet government in relation to the Orthodox clergy seemed wild to the parishioners and inappropriate to the high pastoral rank. Thus, for example, they could not approve of the actions of coercion, including the use of physical force and threats, of the Orthodox clergy to logging. The arguments put forward the laity as opposed to what had happened was the fall in the authority of the Orthodox priest in comparison with the Lutheran one (which was not forced by the secular authorities to physical labor).

There is an interesting fact that testifies to the fading of interest in many actions of church hierarchs. In 1947, interest in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* strongly declined in the Tallinn diocese (from 135 subscribers to 74) (ERAF. F. R-1961. N. 1. Ar. 12. L.9.). The reason for this was difficulties in delivering the magazine to Estonia and the fact that the readers did not receive the last issue of the previous year. The official documents of the Estonian Diocesan Council openly stated that the main printed publication of the Russian Orthodox Church is not only of great religious significance, but also plays an important 'state role' in communication between the 'center and the outskirts'. Of particular concern was the genuine interest in publishing the Tallinn Lutheran

consistory. The same can be said about the Orthodox calendar, which arrived in Estonia only at Easter. From the very vocabulary of the report and the meetings of the Diocesan Council, one can understand how 'imperial' is the perception of reality in the Orthodox parishes of the republic, the reality into which it was planned to 'fit' believing immigrants.

The quantitative change in the Orthodox population of Estonia also gradually became different in the first post-war decade. In 1947, there were 150 thousand Orthodox believers in the whole diocese. In the context of the actual connection of believers with their parishes, these statistics were completely different. The deans recorded that by the end of 1946, seventy-two thousand people 'kept up' the connection with their parishes, of whom 63 thousand were ethnic Estonians and only 9 thousand were Russian. Already in 1947, a steady alienation of the Estonian Orthodox believers towards the Church was observed (ERAF. F. R-1961. N. 1. Ar. 12. L. 11.). Once again, just like in the pre-revolutionary period, their Orthodox confession was regarded as being a part of 'the Russian' faith. Differences in the life of the Lutheran and Orthodox clergy became more and more tangible (in some parishes the Orthodox clergy didn't have an opportunity to create a choir). Finally, more and more Ethnic Estonians couldn't find their place in the Orthodox Church as it was acquiring purely 'Slavic' features.

To sum it up, we can make a conclusion about a gradual transformation of the composition of believers in all three Baltic republics. The changes took place not only in the context of the change of the dominant 'Orthodox ethnos' but also within the frames of the change in traditions and within 'the Russian' Orthodox community. The active resettlement policy of the Soviet authorities led to the introduction of new cultural customs and traditions to the republics. 'Russian' Orthodox of the post-war period are already seen as 'worshippers' rather than parishioners. They participate less in parish life, do not strive for 'the life in the Church', perform a number of rites inherent in the traditional peasant mindset. The local Orthodox believers do not always accept these new rules of life, convert to another religion, and more often just leave the Church.

Unfortunately, the attempts to unite these traditions in the following years will also fail.

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## **SURVIVAL STRATEGIES UNDER A TOTALITARIAN REGIME (1940–1990): A CASE OF ROMAN CATHOLIC NUNS IN LITHUANIA**

*The paper presents how different surviving strategies of Lithuanian Roman Catholic nuns were used in the Soviet totalitarian regime (1940–1990). The research is focused on the life stories of Lithuanian women from three Roman Catholic religious orders – Sisters of the Poor (or Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary), The Little Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Franciscan sisters, whose activities in Soviet times were clandestine. This paper represents the issue of monastic life claimed illegal under the Soviet totalitarian regime and displacement of religious community members. Life stories of the women testify that the main strategy for survival the Roman Catholic nuns living under the Soviet totalitarian regime used was different forms of silent resistance. Under the conditions of persecution, the activity of nuns was very significant retaining the main functions of Catholic Church in Lithuania.*

*Keywords: Roman Catholic nuns, Lithuania, totalitarian regime*

### **Introduction**

“Religious congregations are one of the oldest institutions of the Catholic Church – they have enriched the history of science and art in many countries” (Laukaitytė 1997, 7) with religious and cultural heritage. Religious communities appeared in Lithuania in 13th century and were active almost until the mid-20th century. Later (1940–1949) their official activities were interrupted by the occupation and the totalitarian regime,

however, some congregations continued their clandestine existence underground. The bishops and priests, who supervised the activities of the consecrated people, were the ones who officially knew about the way they functioned.

Different congregations and their activities in Lithuania and in diaspora have been discussed in multiple aspects by different scientists: J. B. Končius (1932), Justinas K. Vaškys (1940), Vincentas Brizgys (1993), Viktoras Gidžiūnas (1970), Bronius Krištanavičius (1973, 1974, 1975), Neringa Markauskaitė (2006), Saulius Bytautas (2011), Vaida Kamuntavičienė (2018) and Aušra Vasiliauskaitė (2020). Leonardas Jagminas in his article *Activities of monasteries in Lithuania in the years of independence and post war period (1918–1990)* (1995) presented the most important spheres of activity by male and female congregations in Lithuania. Regina Laukaitytė (1997, 2011), Arūnas Streikus, Daiva Kuzmickaitė, Vidmantas Šimkūnas (2015), Aušrelė K. Pažeraitė (2003) analysed Lithuanian Catholic congregations in 20th century from historic perspective, referring to archival and written sources. The history of Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was written by Albina Pajarskaitė, referring to archival and written sources (2012). Viktor Bilotas and Kęstutis Žemaitis (2017) have presented a review of activities carried by Lithuanian male Franciscans in the Soviet Union in 1941–1991, including the geography they covered and their typology. E. Laumenskaitė's study (2015) is dedicated to the Catholic religious and social attitudes in totalitarian and post-soviet society, based on a qualitative and quantitative survey. She analyses life stories referring to hermeneutic approach: the storyteller makes his/her own interpretations of their life events (Laumenskaitė 2015, 106). She used the methodology analysing the life stories of 10 nuns.

This paper presents different surviving strategies the Lithuanian Roman Catholic nuns used during the Soviet totalitarian regime. The research is focused on the life stories of Lithuanian women from three Roman Catholic religious orders – Sisters of the Poor, The Little Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Franciscan sisters. This paper

represents the issue of monastic life claimed illegal and displacement of religious community members.

The purpose of a religious order is to follow Christ, practise constant prayer, which includes adoration of the Holy Sacrament, and seek spiritual growth. Communities of religious life differ in their spirituality, each of them having its own mission and vocation. However, consecrated people were not able to properly carry out the mission of their congregation or openly disclose their identity in the Soviet totalitarian regime, because they used to carry out their activities underground in conditions of conspiracy.

The research is based on oral narratives noted in ethnographic fieldwork in recent years. The methods used in the study include ethnographic methods (conversation, interview with key informants, unstructured in-depth interview, life histories) and analysis methods of empirical data and sources: comparative content analysis of literature and sources, as well as interpretation.

Nowadays, narratives are the main research objects for ethnologists, anthropologists, folklorists, sociologists, and historians. Each group investigates oral narratives from different theoretical and methodological approaches. A narrative in this paper is comprehended as a social construct which connects events by giving them meaning (Poggio 2004). Some scholars use narratives as important means enabling us to understand how we “construct” our lives (Bruner 1986). Life story narratives highlight the most important influences, experiences, issues and lessons of a lifetime. A life story narrative can be seen as an experience of someone telling their story, as well as a method of data gathering (Atkinson 2002).

The main source of this article is an ethnographic fieldwork carried out by the author in 2004, 2016 and 2020–2021: referring to the biographical method, the life stories of six nuns from three female congregations are recorded. The years of their birth cover the time span from 1919 to 1955. All of them took active part in religious life in the Soviet times holding on to daily practice of their faith. Referring to the survey carried out by I. E. Laumenskaitė (2015) and five types of religious and social

attitudes singled out by her characterising people who lived in the Soviet times, life stories of women I recorded fall into the category of A type. It is defined as follows: “Active participation in Church life and/or defence of faith against repressive system” (Laumenskaitė 2015, 106).

The narrators chosen for the survey, who represented three different congregations, were well informed, of different age and experience, and came from different fields: medicine, science and education. They were from different ethnographic regions of Lithuania originally: Suvalkija, Dzūkija and Aukštaitija. Two nuns were born in cities, others – in Lithuanian province. Three nuns came from large families, others grew up in families of two or three kids. Their parents (peasants, employees, workers) or at least one of them were highly religious and they played an important part in the socialization of their children. Also, together with grandparents they were responsible for the first religious experiences of the younger generation. Some of them were raised in the period of independent Lithuania and attended Catholic schools, which nurtured their faith, encouraged them to take part in the activities of Catholic organizations of children and young people, others grew up in the Soviet times and attended public schools where religious beliefs were not tolerated. None of them belonged to the Soviet school children’s organizations, such as October children, pioneers or Communist youth, because their parents did not approve of Soviet ideology. The persecutions and challenges they faced in Soviet times hardened them, strengthened their faith and determination to dedicate their lives for the sake of the God and the Church.

The diaries, memoirs and manuscripts of congregations published by their members were used as additional source for the research paper.

The tasks of this research undertaken were: (1) to explore the survival strategy of the Roman Catholic nuns used under the Soviet totalitarian regime; (2) to discuss religious practices of nuns in Soviet times; (3) to divulge their religious clandestine activities.

In 1940 when Lithuania fell victim to the Soviet totalitarian regime, existing religious communities found themselves under threat, because the occupation regime was especially ill-disposed towards them. Historian

A. Streikus points out that “Religious congregations, called ‘parasitic nidi of reactionary ideology’ by the official Soviet propaganda, were condemned to speedy extirpation” (Streikus 2015, 8). Although the totalitarian Soviet regime pursued the policy of forced atheization and restricted the activities of religious institutions, it tried, at the same time, not to incite the dissatisfaction of believers with public statements and severe acts. In Soviet times they preferred to “destroy religious institutions from within, using methods of disguise” (Streikus 2002, 137). Such mechanism used by the Soviet government was effective enough, as in 1949 all religious communities registered in Lithuania were liquidated. They could no longer exist legally, thus, some of them ceased their activities, others resettled in the West, still others continued their activity in Lithuania and went underground.

The female congregations existing underground faced certain challenges: some sisters entered other congregations and communities were split apart. “The main reasons of such problems were the tactics used by special governmental structures (in particular KGB) referring to the principle of “divide and rule [and] the isolation of community members” (AUFBRUCH, 1997–2000).

Although in the 1960s there were no visible signs of religious life, the role of religious activities in underground conditions did not decrease – it actually increased (Streikus 2015, 8). During the subsequent 40 years not a single congregation stopped existing, and at the very critical moment a few new female congregations (Sisters of the Eucharistic Jesus (1946), and Sisters of Christ the King (1957)) were founded. The leaders of the orders also acted in secret, although they were constantly spied on.

Religious orders compelled to exist in the circumstances of conspiracy had to foresee the strategies of their activities underground. The nuns used to gather in small groups for monthly or yearly retreats. Sisters, who had no possibility to attend Mass, were allowed to keep the Holy Sacrament at home. For example, sister Lina Laima Vanagaitė managed to hide the Holy Sacrament in her home radio for about 30 years (Laukaitytė 1997, 146).



“The most important field of activity of nuns was assistance to priests” (Laukaitytė 1997, 153). First, they used to teach catechism which was prohibited to priests. Nuns used to carry out this work in parishes, where they educated young people: organised processions and pilgrimages on religious feast days, e.g., processions from Tytuvėnai to the Marian shrine in Šiluva. They used to conduct church choirs, worked as organists, made liturgical clothes, organized retreats for young people and families with the participation of prominent priests. Sisters with higher education who worked in scientific and cultural institutions were able to “at least to the lowest possible degree spread the light of faith among intelligentsia” (Streikus 2015, 8). A significant number of nuns worked in the sector of health care where they were able to help the sick to give sense to their sufferings and to witness Christ’s love and spread his light with their small services.

Religious practices, such as prayers in May and June, in Soviet times were preserved solely due to the effort of the nuns – priests risked losing their certificate of registration (Laukaitytė 1997, 154), which identified them as cult servants. Besides, they organised groups of Live Rosary (different people committed to praying a part of rosary at home assigned to them) and other Church circles, such as the Franciscans of the Third Order, who united their forces praying for Lithuania. Despite religious persecution intense national movement embraced all Lithuania. In 1969 the Movement of Friends of the Eucharist inspired by sr. Gema Stanelytė and Jesuit priest P. Masilionis started. Gema, sister of the Congregation of Eucharistic Jesus used to organise processions of entreaty and repentance to the Virgin Mary shrine in Šiluva (Laukaitytė 1997, 154), and retreats for young people all around Lithuania. The main organizer of the procession, in 1980 she was accused of breaching the public order and sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment. Sisters Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who lived mainly in Panevėžys, used to take young people on pilgrimages to Šiluva, the Hill of Crosses, the Samogitian Calvary, and Paberžė.

## The Sisters of the Little Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The official congregation of The Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was founded in 1930. It was a branch of the congregation of The Servants of the Sacred heart of Jesus founded by the Capuchin monk Honorato Kozminski in Poland, where it was a secret community of nuns wearing no habit. The sisters of the congregation came to Lithuania in 1919–1920 and started their activity in 1922 as “The Society of Culture of Catholic Women” (Jagminas 1995, 103). Sisters directed the schools of agriculture in Karmėlava and Aukštadvaris, founded the school of trade for girls in Kaunas, took the lead of kindergarten from the society of St. Vincent de Paul, directed the institutions of the society of Child Jesus in Kaunas and founded the orphanage of Tamašava (Jagminas 1995, 103).

The official congregation of The Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which separated itself from “The Society of Culture of Catholic Women” in 1934, got involved in the work of education. Sisters led a Seminary of female teachers in Kaunas (later the gymnasium for girls), a kindergarten, a two-year course of sewing, a hostel for girls and a house of work for girls. In other cities they founded kindergartens, primary schools, schools of agriculture and housekeeping for girls, a sewing shop of liturgical vestments, an orphanage and used to teach Catechism in parishes, supervise processions and distribute Catholic publications. In 1940 the number of congregation members included 118 sisters, 17 novices and 10 postulants (Jagminas 1995, 104).

As Lithuania had already been occupied for a couple of decades, the buildings which were the property of the congregation were nationalised, the institutions of education and charity were rendered state property and sisters were dismissed from pedagogical institutions. Under the conditions of occupation, they used to live in separate flats in groups of a few sisters and work in various institutions: hospitals and parsonages. Secretly they taught Catechism to children, translated, published and distributed books on religion, organised retreats for young people, carried out missions in

the region of the Greater Caucasus, in the Middle Asia, Siberia and different cities of Russia.

Further I will discuss the life story of sister Birutė, who joined the congregation in 1962 at the age of 19. Birutė, a sister of the Little Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was a flamboyant personality, who worked as a doctor in the department of reanimatology for more than 20 years. She was born in 1943 into a poor peasant family of 8 children, whose parents were pious faithful. At the age of 18 she fell seriously ill and being on the threshold of death decided to become a doctor and live for the sake of others if she remained alive. After the recovery she kept the promise, entered the Institute of Medicine, and joined a religious community a year later. On August 14, 1964 she confesses about her vocation to the consecrated life in her diary:

“Just like the morning sun kissing the blossom opens it for joy, You, kind God, have been calling me since early childhood for Love, Nobleness and Beauty. You have chosen me, a fragile creature for Thyself and purposefully have been leading me towards sanctity. You have been calling me to those heights and depths, although I didn't understand then, still wished to erupt in that deep anxiety, to unfold and to consecrate myself. I was so happy when the space of consecrated life opened before me” (Žemaitytė 2015, 35).

Giving her first vows the sister cried of joy, when being a novice she experienced happiness and after the permanent vows she had the feeling of sanctity. Although she felt happy being a nun, her life was not easy.

Sister Birutė recalls: “My life was difficult, as I studied and worked at the same time since the 5th form, I finished the night school, and afterwards started the school of medicine, later entered the institute of medicine. It was very difficult to study. I used to sit with books in front of me until midnight” (PAR, Interview with sr Birutė 2021/1).

Later the sister worked as a doctor in Alytus city. She remembered her youth days:

“While working as a doctor for 10 years straight, I used to go to Russia, the Volga Federal District during my holidays and prepare German Catholic youngsters for sacraments. [...] I could not work with young people in Lithuania, because I was not trusted; I was considered the agent of secret services. I was thrust into a mincing-machine. It was a well-planned net of the KGB with the aim to isolate me from believers. I had to walk the path of suffering, silence and humiliation” (PAR, Interview with sr Birutė 2021/1).

Continuing her life story, Birutė remarks that “people of the heart are meant to become an offering – they keep the world alive” (PAR, Interview with sr 2021/1).

Sister Birutė carried out the mission in the years of 1979–1989 and visited the Volga Federal District 12 times. After her Catechesis she would take the children to Lithuania to show them churches and make them stay in the catholic environment – there they received the sacraments. She could not stay openly with German children whom she used to secretly teach religious truths in Russian as there was no priest and no church there. A certain family introduced Birutė as their relative and would hide her in case of threat. They would drive her to another town – there she would board the plane back home (Visockienė 2009).

Asked how she managed to continue working as a doctor in Soviet times sister responded: “We never wore any exterior signs [...]. There was no possibility for someone to learn that we were nuns. Priest dissident J. Zdebskis used to say: ‘You will be recognized by the style of your life. If you want them not to identify you, start drinking, smoking.’ It was his joke” (PAR, Interview with sr Birutė 2021/1).

In the Soviet period the members of religious orders had certain unwritten rules – they helped each other to survive. Because of conspiracy, instead of calling the superior of the congregation by her real name, sisters used to use some other respectful address, e. g. call her “lady/mistress”

(PAR, Interview with sr Birutė 2021/2). Also, they never used a handwritten prayer book in church.

In the 1960s–1970s a secret retreat was organized every year. Sisters would gather for a retreat lasting a week in a private house which they were unable to leave all that time. It was only the inhabitant of the house who would leave the house because of an urgent matter, e.g., to buy food (PAR, Interview with sr Birutė 2021/2). Sisters were afraid to let a stranger enter the house, even a priest if they did not know him – every unexpected doorbell caused anxiety (Šuliauskaitė 2019, 304). This was also the case when priest dissident J. Zdebskis was hidden in their flat after he ran for his life escaping hospital. Sisters used to invite him for spiritual retreats during which he shared his own life experience and the way he perceived religious truths. He inspired the spirit of self-sacrifice, taught to love God and motherland, and to stay faithful. At that time the retreats were very meaningful and highly effective (Sadūnaitė 2019, 321). When leading retreats, priest J. Zdebskis emphasized the value of suffering and humiliation teaching sisters to unite their lives with Christ's suffering:

“Lord, I accept the present suffering, unite it with that of yours for the brighter future of the people of the whole world and mine, for the souls in the purgatory. Then the suffering, trouble and hardships become lighter, because you give them meaning... It's a great gift that we had such a priest. He was able to give us spiritual support and strength. He is a true luminary” (Sadūnaitė 2019, 322–323).

When comparing the period of the Soviet regime and the situation in Lithuania nowadays, sister Birutė pointed out that at the time when the religious practice was prohibited, there were more vocations to religious life, more optimism and joy. Indifference is the feature prevailing in the major part of modern society (PAR, Interview with sr Birutė 2021/2).

To sum it up, we can maintain that while living in the country ruled by the totalitarian regime sisters strengthened themselves with every-day

prayer, sacramental practices, spiritual retreats and advice of spiritual leaders and that enabled them to grow and survive in the conditions of occupation.

### The congregation of The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Sisters of the Poor)

The congregation of The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, otherwise Sisters of the Poor, was founded by blessed archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis on October 15, 1918, in Marijampolė. Since then, the number of congregation members until 1940 increased from 20 to 130. At that time the sisters were settled in Marijampolė, Vilnius, Kaunas, Telšiai, Vilkaviškis, Kybartai, Karklininkai, Kalvarija Utena, Alytus, Šilalė, Šakiai and Kudirkos Naumiestis. The centre of the congregation was in Marijampolė, where 48 sisters, 18 novices and 9 postulants lived. They ran a printing-house and bookshop *Šešupė*, a primary school under the name of blessed J. Matulaitis, a house for the disabled elderly people and owned a dormitory for female students. They also worked in two kindergartens, children's home, and a sewing shop of liturgical vestments (Pajarskaitė 2010, 9; Jagminas 1995, 101). With the start of the occupation at the end of summer of 1940, the central premises of the congregation including the novitiate in Marijampolė were nationalised, and sisters, who worked as teachers and educators, were dismissed.

The years 1947–1972 of the totalitarian regime were the most difficult period in the life of the community: houses in different places in Lithuania were confiscated, sisters turned out and fired. Sisters of the Poor were deprived of 14 kindergartens, 5 orphanages, 11 homes for the elderly, 3 dormitories and 2 schools all around Lithuania (Jagminas 1995, 107). Dismissal was the most frequent means of repression which prevented them from working in accordance with their education, thus they earned their living serving local churches. Sisters were intensely spied on, and their homes searched. Some sisters started working as housekeepers in rectories living apart from their religious communities. The superior of the

order avoided visiting sisters at home in order not to cause harm. She had to take care of everything, comprehend the tactics of the spies and act accordingly. New conditions of existence urged them to renounce any signs of religious life.

The superior of the congregation had to solve the most complicated issues faced by more than a hundred sisters, satisfying the needs of those who lost what they had from the abundance of those who retained their good. The superior sr. Elena confesses in her memoir notes:

“Personal troubles, duties in the office and broader environment were concentrated in the heart of me alone. It required lot of involvement, besides, retaining watchfulness. We got to know more or less the tactics of the plain-clothes men, thus, to conduct ourselves accordingly. It happened that we were so shaken that it seemed I was about to go crazy. My whole support and refuge were rev. Father Juozas Grigaitis MIC. At that special time, he indeed was given by the God as the spiritual leader of the congregation” (Pajarskaitė 2012, 192).

During the period of the second Soviet occupation, the congregation settled in Lithuania had to undergo systematic and brutal suppression of their activities. Arrests and exile started. The superiors of some congregations were arrested, e.g., Uršulė Novickaitė, the superior of the Sisters of the Poor. The same fate befell Augustina Galdikaitė, the general superior of the Franciscan sisters, the founder of the congregation.

More active nuns were more than once invited to the Public Prosecutor's department and the KGB and induced to break off with active priests and renounce working with young people. Some sisters (the superior sr Uršulė Novickaitė, sisters Emilija Burokaitė and Marytė Grinevičiūtė) were severely inquested and deported to the camps of imprisonment. They were set free only after the death of Josef Stalin in 1953 and returned to their motherland with their health ruined. The superior sr. Elena wrote:

“[...] it was obvious that they were striving to annihilate our family/community. Any sign bearing witness that our family is still alive was considered a criminal offense. We were compelled to hide anything that might betray us as religious sisters, to break the good habits sisters used to cling to, which had become their second nature. Lots of efforts were necessary to constrain ourselves to live under extraordinary conditions” (Pajarskaitė 2012, 191).

Deprived of their homes with a chapel, clausturation and uniforms, sisters were compelled to live among lay people, work in state institutions where antireligious moods prevailed, and that was quite a challenge. A special effort, circumspection and strong will was necessary in order to preserve, maintain and strengthen one's vocation. Spiritual leaders had to be vigilant – it was their duty to organise constant spiritual retreats with special material for meditation which helped to form the inner life of the religious (Pajarskaitė 2012, 192).

In Soviet times a public propagation of religious beliefs was considered a criminal offense. Despite that, The Sisters of the Poor were engaged in clandestine catechesis, published religious literature, proclaimed the fame of archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis and lived in conformity with his motto “overcome evil with goodness”. Besides, they went on missions in Belarus, Russia, later to the Middle Asia (Kyrgyzstan), the Caucasus (Georgia (present Sakartvelo), the Crimea and Siberia, where for 12 years (1985–1997) the Sisters used to serve Catholic deportees from Germany and the Ukraine, helped priests Redemptorists in Prokopjevsk and Novokuzneck (Jagminas 1995, 113). The Sisters started rallying children and families in Marijampolė for Catholic activities, such as taking part in retreats at the time of the most important religious festivities (Christmas, New Year's Eve, Easter, Pentecost) including the events themselves, to distribute Catholic underground publications.

It is worthwhile to mention a few Sisters of the Poor with higher education who held high posts in the Soviet public institutions. Such is the exceptional case of Sister and professor Angelė Vyšniauskaitė (1919–2006) who ran the department of Ethnography in Lithuanian Institute of



History for 10 years since 1961. Her chief assistant was Marija Grigaitytė, a specialist in Lithuanian philology from the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature. They were members of the same congregation which they joined before World War II and they lived together in the same flat.

Angelė's life story bears testimony to the disturbances of the war period, underground studies, unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to the West as a result of which she found herself in the hard-labour prison in Kaunas. In Soviet times she had to go into hiding, change the places of residence and work in different towns. She was subjected to ideological pressure, urged to join the Communist party or even collaborate, to renounce her religious world outlook (Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 2017, 58). The persecuted Angelė and Marija were compelled to keep secret the fact of their belonging to a religious congregation and be vigilant so that their life style did not betray them. In Soviet times two or three sisters used to live in flats they rented. Such was the case of Angelė and Magdalena, members of the Congregation of the Poor. A sister of their spiritual family witnessed: "Even after national rebirth they tended to remain clandestine. They preferred to be treated the way they were used to and retain their previous positions" (PAR, Interview with sr A. P. 2016/1).

Sister Uršulė recalls that "They avoided publicity. [...] They were afraid to take part in community life so as not to be identified as nuns. They used to come to take part in the gatherings of the congregation, however, tried not to attract anyone's attention by which they meant "don't bring us to light" (PAR, Interview with sr Uršulė, 2016/3).

Persecuted because of her religious beliefs prof. A. Vyšniauskaitė did not break down – on the contrary, unfavourable social environment, which prevailed in Soviet times, hardened and formed a mature personality of the scientist, induced her to understand her mission in the world more clearly and realise it. Sr Angelė realised her spiritual calling as a nun, scientific and civic, also, public calling as a scientist, educator, public worker, and, finally, the calling of every Christian to „perform one's life task

assigned by the Creator” as diligent as possible. (Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 2017, 58–59).

Thus, in the Soviet period Sisters tried to act secretly and remain unnoticed by the “vigilant” eye using all possible means of conspiracy. Historians point out that during the Soviet period the role of congregations in Lithuania increased instead of decreasing, as remaining clandestine they carried out the tasks other lay people were not able to do (Streikus 2015).

### Sisters of St. Francis d’Assisi

The charisma of the Franciscan order has always been “apostolic work and deeds of charity (i.e., teaching Catechism, parish work)” (Baleišaitė-Sabakonienė 2015, 124). In the Soviet period the Franciscan sisters, especially those who worked in hospitals, used to engage themselves in spiritual assistance in their work places. Most often nuns worked as doctor assistants or nurses and in this way, they were able to assist dying people. They used to secretly bring a priest dressed in civil clothing to a dying person who wished to confess and receive the sacrament of the sick. Also, avoiding to be disclosed by the governing body of the institution the Sisters used to baptise new-born babies and assisted the sick with various sacraments. To quote one of the Franciscan sisters, the nuns were “nurses of the soul”.

Besides their official work other Franciscan sisters used to teach children Catechism at their homes and prepare them for their first Holy Communion. The lessons were delivered to small groups of 2–10 students who used to gather in different homes so that the illegal activity carried out by the sisters was not disclosed. Sr Teresė’s life story serves as an example of an such activity.

Teresė, a Franciscan sister worked as a nurse in the department of Neurosurgery of Kaunas Clinical Hospital for 20 years. She was born into a pious family of 6 children in 1940 in Kaunas. A young girl working as a servant she did not consider herself pious. She recalls entering the church of St. Michael Angel in Kaunas for the religious service held in



*Figure 1.* Sister Teresė at her room. Photo by Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė. Kaunas, 2021.

May and found herself in some extraordinary state of being, everything changed inside as if she had discovered a new world.

Later she learnt about the existence of clandestine congregations by word of mouth. At the age of 24 she got acquainted with clandestine nuns who invited her to join the congregation of St. Francis d'Assisi. Teresė entered the community in 1963:

“We, sisters, used to rent the ground floor of a private dwelling house, and the owners lived on the first floor. At the beginning there were 3 of us, then the number rose to 9. We were spied on and tried to go to church one by one in order to prevent them from recognizing us. [...] When I entered the congregation, perhaps some 9 girls from the church followed me. It wasn't widely known then that clandestine congregations existed. I used to tell the girls taking part in church services how happy I am” (PAR, interview with sr Teresė, 2020/2).

The example of sr Teresė within a short span of time encouraged other young girls to follow her path.

Besides working as a nurse sr Teresė started serving in the church of St. Anthony of Padua in 1962. In Soviet times the KGB prohibited to take part in adoration and to assist at Mass if a person was under 16. Sr Teresė recalls:

“I would let girls as old as 10 or 12 to walk in front of the Holy Eucharist during procession and toss flowers, I paid no heed to the official restrictions. The parish priest soon “attracted the attention” of the security service. Rev. *Šniūkšta* was a very good parish priest. He used to scold me for not sticking to the requirements of the Soviet state authority. Later sacristan Antanas told me: the Parish priest said that sr Teresė is a true nun. I reprove her, she listens silently and continues to do it her way” (PAR, interview with sr Teresė, 2021/8–9).

During religious feasts, morning-evening adoration in the church lasted for 3 days. There used to gather quite a lot of girls. They would go to the oak-wood by the zoo to pick violets on the hill slopes so that they had flowers for the procession. Older girls would organise processions on Sunday mornings and evenings. At the beginning they had white clothing sown for the adoration, and later they acquired national costumes.

The parish started organising the Day of Adoration Girls which was celebrated on December 8 when commemorating the Immaculate conception of Mary, Mother of God. The festivity included performances, chants and short programmes with national content. Nuns used to gather with adoration girls in someone’s home. On that occasion they would invite a priest, quite often rev. J. Zdebskis who would give a talk on religious and national matters (PAR, interview with sr Teresė in 2020).

It should be noted here that religion was an important part of national identity in the Soviet Lithuania. Historian A. Streikus has pointed out that this is a distinguishing feature peculiar to Lithuania which singles it out among other occupied Baltic countries (Streikus 2002, 8).

Sister Teresė used to teach children catechism, prepared them for sacraments and provided children with religious booklets. It was a risky

activity in Soviet times. The Sister recalls: “I was under the threat of being imprisoned when teaching children. If someone reminded me of it, I used to respond: Prison is for saint people. If they don’t arrest me, I am not a saint” (PAR, Interview with sr. Teresè, 2020, 11).

Sister Teresè started teaching children Catechism when asked by her relatives. After she took her first vows the nun agreed to teach her sister’s kids who were joined by their neighbours. In the beginning sr Teresè prepared 5–6 children to receive the sacrament of the Holy Communion. The priests of the parish church learnt about it and sent groups of children to her. Shortly after the room turned to be too small for the increased number of children and they had to build one more floor above the sacristy which housed 100 people. Then groups of 100 children started attending her lessons.

Sr Teresè pointed out that “security services knew about her activity but did not interfere because she had a modest education (had finished a school of medicine – author’s note), came from a family of poor peasants, seemed to be neutral what concerned political matters and was very modest in any matter. They did not use to punish such sisters with imprisonment” (PAR, interview with sr Teresè in 2020).

One more aspect of sr Teresè’s activity needs to be highlighted – her selfless help when nursing the dissident priest J. Zdebskis, which resulted in her suffering a loss in her job. The nun was punished by preventing her to acquire higher medical qualification.

In 1986 when she was still working in Kaunas Clinical Hospital, rev. Zdebskis was taken there by another nun in order to get first aid. Sr Teresè was asked to help when hospitalising the priest whose condition was very grave as he could hardly stand on his own legs and his buttocks and sex organs were affected by chemical substances. Security Service intended to turn him into a venereal patient. Sr Teresè asked the head of the Clinical Department of Burns to admit him to the department she worked at – the latter agreed, however, next morning, the department head was very angry at Teresè as she had become responsible for “the trouble”. Shortly after the priest was seen by the Security Service. Rev. J. Zdebskis understood



*Figure 2.* Girls from St. Anthony parish that participated in adoration and processions. Kaunas, 1962. Photo from D. Gritėnaitė album. Photographer is unknown.



*Figure 3.* The First Holy Communion in the Roman Catholic parish of St. Anthony of Padua. Kaunas, 1987. Photo from sr Teresė album. Photographer is unknown.

they were going to turn him into a venereal patient and decided to escape the hospital. It was owing to sr Birutė that they managed to secretly carry out the plan. The priest was taken to a new flat of a Franciscan sister, where faithful doctors nursed him for a few months. Sr Teresė pointed out:

“The most important agents of the story are sr Birutė and doctor Genutė Drąsutytė, who also became a nun later. After she took rev. Zdebskis to the sisters’ place, dr. Drąsutytė decided to remain there refusing to look after her sick father for the whole month. She provided medical care and at nights sr Birutė did intravenous infusions. She was smart enough to get blood for the blood transfusion under the names of other people (PAR, Interview with sr Teresė, 2020, 4).

Meanwhile sr Teresė’s duty was to deliver food, medicine and bandages at 5.30–6 a.m. every day. In order not to be recognized she used to put on sunglasses. They learnt later that the Security Service discovered the place the seriously ill priest was being cured at and intended to take him to the dispensary for venereal diseases. Sisters tried to make the news public to defend rev. Zdebskis against the slander. His most zealous confrate of the time announced the news when preaching. Thus rev. Zdebskis was not taken to the special institution.

The story, just like the facts, published in *The Chronicle of Lithuanian Catholic Church*, witnesses that making certain news public was the strongest weapon Lithuanian Catholic Church could use against the lies of the Soviet totalitarian regime.

## Conclusion

The life stories and diaries of the women introduced above testify that the main survival strategy of displaced Roman Catholic nuns living under the Soviet totalitarian regime was different forms of silent resistance. On the one hand, focusing on spiritual life, permeated with prayer, spiritual practices and monastic vows (of poverty, chastity and obedience)

they managed to sustain the vitality of their congregations (Laukai-tytė 1997, 158). On the other hand, publicity measures used by the nuns helped them to combat the slander by the regime.

The Roman Catholic nuns were engaged in various clandestine religious practices in the Soviet Lithuania, such as adoration, the Holy Communion, confession, The Holy Mass, community prayer, spiritual retreats and reading theology and philosophy books, which used to strengthen sisters living in conditions of occupation.

In the Soviet period the female religious orders were engaged in several clandestine religious activities, namely: 1) they became involved in pastoral work in parishes, 2) they carried out catechesis and were engaged in the work of spiritual education forming young people in the parish and beyond its borders, 3) they worked as doctors and nurses carrying out the apostolic work in their institutions, 4) they organized retreats for young people and families, 5) they educated intelligentsia, 6) they created and distributed illegal religious publications, 7) they provided pastoral care to deportees, 8) they carried out missionary work among people of other nationalities in different parts of the U.S.S.R. (such as Kazakhstan, the Volga Federal District), 9) they were engaged in social and charity work.

Under the conditions of persecution, only nuns could perform the functions which normally were the prerogative of the laity or priests (Streikus 2014, 110), thus their activity was very important in preserving the main functions of the Lithuanian Catholic Church during the Soviet occupation.

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## SCIENTIFIC ATHEISM IN SOVIET LATVIA AS A STRATEGIC ELEMENT OF KHRUSHCHEV'S ANTI-RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGNS

*The aim of this article is to analyse the changes in scientific atheism during Nikita Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign (1958–1964). The study uses materials found in archives and publications of the given period. Formally, this campaign started when the 21st Congress of the Communist Party brought in a new, more radical programme of anti-religious propaganda. Atheism was both a goal (creating atheist society) as well as a strategy (to minimize influence of organized religion). Its main characteristics were: 1) involvement of former clergy; 2) more intensive teaching of atheism in schools and universities (after education system was criticized by party leadership for shortcomings in atheist education); 3) use of sociological research; 4) changing role of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults from at least formal mediator in state-church relations to more active involvement in combating religion); 5) use of scientific achievements in atheist education of masses (planetarium as a pedagogical tool, use of space conquering in atheist propaganda). At the same time, Soviet leadership had to admit that all these measures did not eliminate religion. In some cases official reports pointed to resurgence of religion. Scientific atheism served as a form of collaborationism (in the broadest sense of this term) – that is why it was often formal and at the same time, within the limitations, provided a relatively safe space for scholars interested in studying religion.*

*Keywords: Khrushchev, atheism, church, Christianity, sociology*

## Introduction

Scientific atheism of Soviet period is analysed less than state and church relationships or persecutions of believers in the USSR. However, there are some important monographs like the ones written by Dimitry Pospelovsky (Pospelovsky 1987–1988) and Victoria Smolkin (Smolkin 2018). The author of this article has concentrated on scientific atheism in Soviet Latvia during the Khrushchev era. Research is based on archive materials and publications of that period.

It can be questioned why de-Stalinization was not followed by greater freedom of religion. Stalin's death created an ideological vacuum that Khrushchev had to fill with new content. Building communism in the near future was the goal he set. Achieving this goal meant, among other things, getting rid of the remnants of the past, among which religion was also included. The rivalry and ideological dualism inherent in the Cold War contributed to the rise of ideological issues. In addition to this reason, the influence of high-ranking officials close to Khrushchev on the strengthening of the role of atheism in ideology must also be taken into account. Among them were Alexei Rumiantsev, the Head of the Culture Division of the Central Committee, Mihail Suslov, the Head of the Propaganda Division and others. In 1954 Dmitrii Shepilov, editor of *Pravda* (Truth), sent a letter to Khrushchev where he wrote that churches are becoming more active signifying that there are problems with the atheist propaganda (Smolkin 2018, 63). This clash of different views on the church-state relationships and different fractions among members of the party elite appeared also at the end of the 1940s. In 1946, reorganization of the party structures dealing with propaganda and agitation took place. In 1947 Georgy Alexandrov, the Head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (later the Director of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy), criticised the work of structures responsible for the church-state relationships. However, after meetings where various proposals were discussed no changes were made to current policies (Odincov 2014, 360–366).

There are different views about the role of Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich in restarting more restrictive approach to organized religion. Bonch-Bruevich was a dedicated Communist who was a leading atheist already before the Second World War, and he wanted to intensify atheist education and therefore actively supported the strengthening of the role of scientific atheism. At the same time, he was not supportive of restrictive measures. For example, his essay included in the collection of articles published in Latvian in 1955 (a translation from Russian edition of 1954) is moderate in terms of its style. He stated that “the party has always warned against wrong, harmful methods of combating religious prejudice” (Bončs-Brujevičs 1955, 13). He was also careful to ensure that this defense of the limited freedom of religious organizations was not seen by readers (especially those in power) as a support for religion. “We will never forget and must not forget that religion is an opium for the people” (Bončs-Brujevičs 1955, 19–20).<sup>1</sup>

William Taubman in his book on Khrushchev adds another argument to the debate on causes of atheist campaigns by writing that Soviet leader “may have also seen it as a form of de-Stalinization in that it abandoned Stalin’s compromise with religion and returned to Lenin’s more militant approach” (Taubman 2005, 512). Khrushchev’s son Sergei gives a smoothed image of his father and recalls that his father was the first Soviet politician to attempt to establish relations with the papacy, sending Sergei’s sister and her husband to Italy on the pretext of a journalistic visit. He has also been described as having an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of Christian Scripture (Ornum 2013).

We also should take into consideration the fact that a decade had passed since the end of the Second World War, and the mood of the people of the previously German-occupied territories was no longer to be reckoned with, as the Soviet power had strengthened. Earlier an instability of the first post-war years had to be taken into account. Many still remembered that the German occupation authorities were more favorable to religious organizations than the Soviet ones. Both regimes used religion

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<sup>1</sup> Criticism of the personality cult of Stalin was not started yet therefore readers can find in this text also references to Stalin’s works (Bončs-Brujevičs 1955, 4).

for their own ends, but the Nazis allowed the opening of previously closed churches. For example, there were 70 Orthodox churches in the Crimea after German occupation ended, 69 of them were opened during occupation (Petrov 2021, 653). This was an unpleasant fact for the Soviet system, which sacralized its role in the Second World War.

We can definitely claim that changes in the policy created a problem for two councils in charge of the church-state relations (one was responsible for relationships with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), another one supervised other denominations and religions), which at the beginning did not know how to adapt to the two conflicting models – Stalin's emphasis on administration and Khrushchev's ideological approach. New political 'winds' affected employees who worked in the structures that oversaw the church-state relationships. Those who were not in line with the new, stricter policy of the church-state relations were made redundant (in some cases, through retirement). The Chairperson of the Council for Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church at the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Georgy Karpov, was the most outstanding among them. He believed that the international relations and prestige of the ROC should be used in the interests of the Soviet foreign politics. In 1960, he left his position (Chumachenko 2011, 9–17). At the same time, it would not be right to consider Karpov as a 'good guy' – he, similarly to his colleagues, was an employee of the Soviet nomenclature. Karpov was a leading member of the state security institutions, whom Stalin involved in reviving the activities of the ROC (and later other denominations) in order to use them for his own purposes.

In archive files we can find also reflections made by local officials dealing with state-church relationships. In April 1960, A. Saharov, Plenipotentiary of the Council for Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in Latvia, gave a paper in the all-Union meeting of Plenipotentiaries where he tried to define what has changed in attitude of the Soviet state towards religion. According to him two principles have remained – freedom of consciousness and understanding that religion is an ideology hostile to Soviet system. "What has changed is our attitude to persons who are influenced by religious ideology and to what they are doing" (LNA-LVA,

PA-101-23-138, 59). He was concerned that religious organizations are still active. Two are named – Catholics who still involve children in worship services and have pilgrimages and Old Believers who still have prayers at homes (LNA-LVA, PA-101-23-138, 63). Other reports showed also concerns of Soviet officials that so-called ‘sectarians’ (mainly Baptists and Adventists) attract young people and expand the work of evangelism.

### Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaigns: chronology and logistics

There were two decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1954 on atheism. The order “On Significant Deficiencies in Scientific Atheist Work and its Improvement” adopted on July 7, 1954 by the Communist Party leadership marks a return to pre-war principles in the USSR policy, when the activities of religious organizations were severely restricted. It demanded more intensive work of propagandists. It stated that religious organizations have become more active and have adapted to the present situation. Language of the document is very straightforward in its demands – “the passivity in relation to religion must be vigorously stopped, the reactionary nature and harmfulness of religion must be exposed” (Par reliģiju un baznīcu 1966, 76). However, the members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (G. Malenkov, K. Voroshilov, etc.) who had participated in the church policy initiated by J. Stalin during the Second World War, which slightly liberalized the state’s attitude towards the church while incorporating it into the Soviet propaganda system, opposed it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Research shows that freedom given to religious organizations after Stalin’s meeting with Orthodox leadership (in 1943) was relative. Repressions continued – in 1945 according to statistics of NKVD number of arrested “religious anti-Soviet elements” was 1961, mainly persons classified as sectarians (989), as well as Orthodox (690). During the meeting with Stalin metropolitan (later patriarch) Sergius asked to release from prison church leaders and later the list of 26 hierarchs was prepared. He did not know that 25 of them were already executed during purges of 1937–1938. But even the one still alive (Archbishop Nikolai) was released only in May 1945 (Budnickij 2019).



On November 10, 1954, a new order was issued, contrary to the previous one, and condemned the arbitrariness of the authorities in their relations with the church. It states, “Any administrative measures and abusive actions against believers and clergy can only harm, strengthen and even exacerbate their religious prejudices” (PSKP CK Lēmums 1954, 2). The decision also sets out a differentiated treatment of Western clergy: “It cannot be ruled out that in the capitalist society some clergymen may on many basic political issues move on to the point of view of the working class people” (PSKP CK Lēmums 1954, 2). This regulation admitted that there have been “serious mistakes”. By that, it meant insults on believers, it also points to the low quality of many materials published by propagandists. “It is often tolerated that people who are uneducated in propaganda of scientific atheism, sometimes even potboilers (*halturisti* in Russian), who mostly know only anecdotes and various stories about clergy, write in the press and give lectures and reports” (Par reliģiju un baznīcu 1966, 80).

Relations between religious organizations and the Soviet state began to deteriorate again at the end of the 1950s when preparations for comprehensive restrictions of religious organizations began. In 1958 the Central Committee of the Communist Party instructed all the state, party, and public institutions to begin the struggle against “religious remnants” (Rozenāls 2017, 164–166). The document “On Deficiencies in Scientific Atheist Propaganda” (September 12, 1958) issued by the Propaganda and Agitation Division of the Central Committee of the Communist Party states that state and party institutions have reduced or stopped their anti-religious activities as a result of previous criticism, therefore atheist propaganda must be strengthened (Zapiska Otdela propagandy i agitacii 1958).

In 1960 there was another decision exposing a more militant language against religion – its rebukes functionaries claiming that sometimes they are passive, “without the required sharpness” (Par reliģiju un baznīcu 1966, 84). This document especially called for work among women to decrease the level of religiosity among them. In the XXII Congress of the

Community Party (1961) its By-Laws were amended and new version stated that it is a duty of the party members to fight against “religious prejudices” (Par reliģiju un baznīcu 1966, 85). As written by Dimitrij Pospelovskij, despite the fact that the XXII Congress of the Communist Party is often called the most liberal of all, because it was even more critical of Stalinism than the XX Congress, it was marked by an aggressive policy against religion. The Congress adopted a new programme of the Communist Party that aimed to build communism within twenty years. Religion was seen as an obstacle to this ideal. N. Khrushchev expressed the view that it is impossible to lead people toward communism if they live with capitalist prejudices. Other Soviet institutions and organizations saw it as a signal for action. The XIV Congress of the Communist Youth in 1962 called for the “reactionary nature” of religion to be exposed, and new By-Laws were adopted that obliged every member of that organization to oppose “religious prejudice” (Pospelovskij 1987, 80).

The intensity and style of Khrushchev’s campaign against the church (ridicule of believers, especially the clergy) was reminiscent of the campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s. Only at that time clergy and believers were generally classified as enemies of the working class, whereas in Khrushchev’s time, as ideological enemies. Restrictions on the activities of religious organizations caused bitterness in church leaders, who were generally diplomatic and loyal to the Soviet regime. Patriarch Alexy wrote to Karpov at the end of 1959 that he “was in pain for every disturbance in the peaceful life of the church; now this peace is greatly disturbed.” He goes on to say that, “you personally understand this very well” (Ljashenko & Lavinskaja et. al. 2010, 296).

Local authorities obviously had to adopt to all these fluctuating changes. In August 1954 the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Latvia (in Latvian – *Latvijas Komunistiskā (bolševiku) partija*) discussed problems of atheist education. Based on reports it found that people go on pilgrimages, choirs are active in churches. The Bureau sent directives to the district party committees to deal with that. In January 1958 in another meeting the Bureau discussed

anti-Soviet actions like hanging the flag of independent Latvia and illegal groups in schools. It also raised concerns that about 21 000 deportees have returned to Latvia, among them also clergy. In August 1958, the Bureau instructed poets and composers to compose texts and music necessary for Soviet traditions, to publish atheist brochures, to install radio broadcasting points in the farmstead where to broadcast atheist programs (Strods 1996, 326–328). Impact of atheist propaganda was less than expected – in 1963 in districts of Daugavpils, Krāslava, Ludza, Preiļi and Rēzekne (all these areas were dominated by the Catholic Church) 80% of children were baptized in churches (Strods 1996, 329). In February 1964, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia again discussed how to fight against the religion. It followed general directives from Moscow and decided to start in academic year 1964/1965 specialization of students in atheism at the Faculty of History of the State University of Latvia. It also decided to organize the Council of Coordination of Atheist Propaganda under the Academy of Sciences as well as training courses for propagandists of atheism in the Party Political Education House in Riga (Strods 1996, 331).

A short period at the second part of the 1950s when nationally orientated communists were in power in Latvia is characterised by increased role of Latvian language, opposition to immigration from other Soviet Republics and forced industrialization connected with that. However, National Communists were not more open to religion than their predecessors. When Catholic bishop Pēteris Strods met with Eduards Berklavs, Deputy Chair of the Council of Ministers, most of his requests (for example, permission to finish building of churches in five places where construction works were started before 1940) were rejected. The only exception was to allow publication of the prayer book in Latgalian (LNA-LVA, PA-101-22-108, 14). The print-run was increased from 1500 to 3000 copies – it seems that Berklavs was open to increased print-run, the report quoted here mentions that in spite of heavy workload of printing-press maybe it will be possible to increase it (LNA-LVA, PA-101-22-108, 14).

Jānis Kalnbērziņš, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Latvia, in report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow wrote that, following instructions from Moscow, local leaders of the Party are paying more attention to issues of atheist propaganda and control over religious organizations. Three clergymen have been brought to court for religion education of children. Work to stop pilgrimages has intensified (in Soviet bureaucratic language – “Extensive measures are being developed to deter believers from pilgrimage to Aglona on 15 August” (LNA-LVA, PA-101-22-108, 69)). Another report written a year later shows what kind of measures were taken – priests were forbidden to go to Aglona to participate in services, they had to lead services in their own local churches and were warned not to encourage believers to go to Aglona. In many collective farms 15 August, the Feast of the Assumption, was a working day. Local authorities organized cultural activities to keep people away from the church. Despite that, authorities had to admit that most of local farmers in Latgale did not work that day, people were dressed in festive clothes. Services in Aglona were still attended by 3000–4000 persons; in 1959 by 8000–9000 persons (LNA-LVA, PA-101-23-138, 105–106).

After removal of Khrushchev from office in October 1964, anti-religious campaign ended and was criticized for being counter-productive. From then on, the atheist propaganda employed a more moderate tone. However, the effects of the campaign were felt, especially when it came to deprived churches (for example, in Latvia Lutherans and the Orthodox even lost their cathedrals in Riga).

Further in this article I will concentrate on some features of scientific atheism in the given period.

### Involvement of former clergy in the propaganda work

The media actively publicized the resignation of pastors portraying them as disillusioned in religion. However, resignation of pastors appears to be a staged, planned event, as one official report in advance stated that

there would be others “about to announce that they are leaving the church” (LNA-LVA, PA-101-22-108, 69). Former pastors were involved to use their insiders’ experience and to teach propagandists about the Bible. As said by the former Seventh day Adventist preacher Jānis Birziņš, “Adventists base their doctrine of faith on the Bible, so atheists need to know this book” (Nikitins 1960, 18). It should be noted that it was difficult to implement it in a country where the Bible was rarity. Propagandists used elements of fieldwork and visited Adventist worship services to learn how Adventist Sabbath School (one part of Saturday service) works. Special attention was paid to individual work with believers (secularised form of pastoral care), which was considered as one of the most effective methods of propaganda. However, it was also understood that it is more time-consuming – propagandists should know the believer personally, he or she should be seen as authority by the believer (Podmazovs 1961, 10).

In 1961, a collection of life stories of resigned pastors and former ‘ordinary’ believers was published in 10 000 copies (Es atsakos 1961). These stories followed the roles of genre set by initiators of anticlerical campaign – their disappointment with hypocrisy of church hierarchy, disillusion with religious dogmas, joy of being determined to take a step and leave the church. Former clergy of various denominations was included in this book to cover the confessional spectrum starting from Roman Catholics to Pentecostals and Jehovah Witnesses (last two religious groups were not legally allowed to register). Among the texts published in this book there are also formal applications of resignation like the one written by Boļeslavs Zvejsalnieks, a former Catholic priest who renounced his faith in 1958 (Es atsakos 1961, 11–12). He was very active in atheist work and was often invited to have public talks. Soviet authorities considered him very useful for propaganda because he managed to attract people’s attention (LNA-LVA, PA-101-22-108, 69). There is an interesting episode of his life. One day he was threatened by an unknown woman who in December 1962 phoned him. It happened after publication of his book

*The Lost Years.* The Committee for State Security was unable to find who threatened him (LNA-LVA, PA-101-25-86, 103).

Introduction to the testimonies of renounced faith mentioned above includes the belief typical to atheist propagandists – if they succeed in convincing believers that science proves the non-existence of God, religion will perish. “Now every believer, if he seriously learns, will reflect on the material and the knowledge that human society has today about human beings, about nature, about the laws of social development, and will definitely renounce religion” (Es atsakos 1961, 6). Similarly, Dzidra Meikšāne from the Schools’ Research Institute in her brochure on atheist education of children writes: “Soon people will fly to the Moon, Venus, Mars and once again make sure that there are no supernatural forces. Science leaves no room for faith in gods or their dwellings” (Meikšāne 1963, 15).

Publications of former clergymen often included stories about their former colleagues and superiors to show them in negative light. This approach was part of more general trend of propaganda materials that insulted believers, especially the clergy, accusing them of obscurity and all kinds of transgressions. For example, in 1964 a newspaper in Riga published an article that starts with a “Gothic” description of the Calvary Baptist Church – “Looking from the street, it seems that this gloomy, old wooden building is uninhabited. Over time, the moisture has tarnished walls, the window eyes are blind.” Article is about one Baptist family. Author does not hesitate to include personal details like scandals among family members. However, it is interesting that the address of the Baptist church is given thus potentially providing directions to those who even after reading criticism would be interested in checking what was going on (Greka 1964, 7).

Reasons why clergymen renounced their faith differ from person to person. We should keep in mind that they were under severe pressure from Soviet authorities. At the same time, we should not make generalisations. There were also pastors who left their position before Khrushchev’s campaign started. Adventist minister J. Birziņš left the church

in 1947 (Čerņevskis 1998, 53). Baptist minister Oskars Puķītis at the end of the Soviet era renounced his atheist activities and in 1985 wrote to newspaper *Cīņa* (Struggle), a leading newspaper in Latvia, that he did not want to be considered an atheist. From 1972, he stopped giving atheist lectures (Tēraudkalns 2003, 196).

### Teaching atheism in schools and universities

After the present educational system was criticized by the Party leadership for shortcomings, changes were introduced in atheist education. According to the new policy, the previous approach defined as the theory of irreligious education was criticised. This theory was based on an assumption that it is better not to talk with children in schools about religion because this can only motivate them to start thinking about it (LNA-LVA, 479-1-76, 12). Starting from academic year 1964/65 in universities and in other institutions of higher education with specialization in medicine, agriculture and pedagogy a compulsory study course on scientific atheism was introduced. An exam was obligatory for this course (Par reliģiju un baznīcu 1966, 89). On the one hand, Soviet ideologists instructed teachers to be sensitive to religious pupils, on the other hand, the system was repressive – “the pioneer’s name of honour (..) is incompatible with participation in religious ceremonies.” (Paligmateriāli skolotājiem 1956, 23). By-Laws of the Club of Young Atheists established at the 1st Secondary School of Krāslava state in the duties of its members that they should be “irreconcilable fighters against all forms of religiosity at school” (LNA-LVA, 479-1-81, 108).

*The Club of Militant Atheists*, the brochure published in 1960, describes work of atheist propaganda in the Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute (now Daugavpils University). It shows how humiliating some of these actions were for believers. In 1957 the Faculty of Philology organized an open communist youth meeting that “looked at the student’s personal file”. The student was involved in the Baptist Church. The author of the article complained that other students were poorly prepared to fight religion

(Nikitins 1960, 5). This experience triggered more intensive work in the field of atheism in the given institution of higher education. There was a competition of lectures on atheism given by students. A Commission analyzed topicality of the lecture, emotionality of the speaker, reading methodology (comprehensibility, visual aids), listeners' interest (Nikitins 1960, 7). As we can learn from the titles of lectures typically to Soviet atheist propaganda attention was paid to natural sciences – chemistry against superstition, human origin (Nikitins 1960, 14, 20). Public events were often used to punish and humiliate believers or just people who were caught to be involved in religious rites like weddings. A local newspaper published in Daugavpils mentioned the names of members of Komsomol who participated in church wedding. They were publicly rebuked. It was also admitted that some members of Komsomol still attended the church (Arakčejeva 1962).

At the same time, the work of atheists in educational institutions often was formal and not well attended. A glimpse of that is given by one student at the Academy of Agriculture in Jelgava who wrote that lectures on scientific atheism are attended by less than 10 students (the article is about the fact that there are too many study courses (Vēronis 1962)).

### Intense production of atheist literature

Hand in hand with the increased role of atheism, production of various books and brochures came, some of them for limited circulation (for propagandists). Some of them were written by local authors, some were translations of foreign authors and authors from other Soviet Republics. For example, Soviet authorities published the *The Amusing Bible*, a selection of the Old Testament texts with commentaries and satirical drawings by the French author Leo Taxil (Taksils 1962). It was a work critical of the Bible texts, but at the same time it was an opportunity for a wide range of readers (the book was published in a circulation of 30,000 copies) to get acquainted with the Bible stories.



Many of the published materials were polemical, full of slogans. In March 1964, the Riga Medical Institute organized the 1st students' scientific conference on scientific atheism. Collection of thesis shows that papers were aimed at showing that religion is harmful and trying to prove atheism with references to science. For example, authors of the paper on resuscitation and religion used the paper to advertise the achievements of Soviet medicine by providing figures how many people had been rescued and how sufficient technical equipment was (Kiršentāls & Borovkovs et al. 1964, 12–13). Another paper follows the criticism of the lack of atheist propaganda expressed by the party elite and writes that in the recent past atheism was taught occasionally in some lectures and in some anti-religious events. Authors admitted that there were problems but the situation had improved – a formal group of students-atheists was established at the Department of Marxism-Leninism, students had prepared several lectures on atheism (Krišāns, Spružs et al. 1964, 14). In another paper, authors criticised involvement of religious organizations in the Soviet Peace movement. “Religious ideology does not promote but hinders the active work of believers for peace” (Lībietis, Spružs et al. 1964, 16). This last aspect corresponds to the contradictory aspects of Soviet policies. It can be argued that Soviet authorities promoted foreigners, including clergy, who were in favor of the Soviet system. This is shown, for example, by the then secret report written of the Plenipotentiary of the CARC to A. Puzin, the Chairperson of the CARC, about the visit of the pro-Soviet Norwegian Lutheran pastor Ragnar Forbeck to Latvia in 1962. “Mr. Forbeck was very polite and friendly. He did not ask any provocative questions. Everything he saw gave rise to genuine excitement” (LNA-LVA, 1448-1-261, 56). The Riga City Executive Committee organized a reception for Mr. Forbeck, where he said he did not support Norway's accession to the NATO and that he was being persecuted for his political stance (LNA-LVA, 1448-1-261, 54). R. Forbeck was one of the few clergy mentioned by the Soviet press and was favored by the Soviet authorities (he was the winner of the Stalin International Prize for Strengthening Peace Among Nations). However, R. Forbeck and others like him were also criticized in the texts

intended for local readers' consumption, saying that "the public role of religion is and remains harmful" (Boļšovs 1958, 2).

In their criticism of religious organizations, Soviet propagandists followed official positions, which of course changed over the years. For example, in the 1950s an especially negative attitude was shown to the Roman Catholic Church instructing teachers to talk about its negative role in history, for example, in supporting the Nazi regime during the Second World War (Palīgmateriāli skolotājiem 1956, 77). It changed in the 1960s after the 2nd Vatican Council when relations between the Vatican and the USSR slightly improved. Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in terris* (1963) demanded renunciation of nuclear weapons and disarmament. The Soviet government saw changes in the Catholic Church as an opportunity to pursue Soviet international policy. A secret CARC report on the 2nd Vatican Council states that "we are undoubtedly interested in the Catholic Church consolidating the peacekeeping positions it is currently seeking to take" (LNA-LVA, 1448-1-268, 6). At the same time, during Khrushchev's campaigns against religious organizations, pilgrimages like other mass expressions of religiosity were under attack, one of materials designed for propagandists has a separate chapter entitled *Pilgrimages of believers should be ended* (LNA-LVA, 479-1-80, 13.–14).

Soviet official authors often had limited access to religious literature and contemporary scholarly literature on religion. Therefore, atheist literature often contained mistakes. For example, the book published in 1962 as a course book in higher education states that Pentecostals like Adventists practice foot washing (Moskalenko 1962a, 467). It is not true of all Pentecostals. Articles are often negative, even insulting. For example, about Adventists one of the authors says, "person who becomes an Adventist loses a true picture of the world. A believer does not think how to be useful to society through work, he thinks how to save his soul" (Moskalenko 1962b, 460). The chapter on world religions has only quotes from Marx and Engels (Anisimov 1962, 29–33). Buddhism in Tibet is incorrectly called 'Lamaism' and even the term 'church' is used when

describing communities of Tibetan Buddhism (Manzhigeev 1962, 34–44). That reminds of Eurocentric ‘old school’ of religious studies in the 19th century.

More qualitative works on religion were published after the period analysed in this article. But even then that work mainly concentrated in Moscow and Leningrad. For example, Latvian philosopher Jānis Nameisis Vējš in 1976 published the work on Anglicanism which contains a lot of valuable information, partly gained during his studies in Oxford (he was one of a few allowed to study in the West during the Soviet period). But this book was published in Moscow and in Russian (Veish 1976).

### Use of sociological research

After sacralization of dialectical materialism in Stalin’s work of 1938 (*On Dialectical and Historical Materialism*) there was no place for sociology left in Soviet science. According to the view of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy of that time, “the history of the development of society is (..) the history of producers of material values themselves, the history of the masses of workers” (Staļins 1954, 48). The worldview based on these principles was considered scientific and therefore the only way how to reflect on social processes. In Stalin’s words “the science of the history of society (..) can become the exact science as, say, biology” (Staļins 1954, 30). Only starting from the 1950s sociology slowly came back to the list of officially recognized disciplines of Soviet science. In 1955, the Decree of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party gave Soviet scholars a permission to participate in the upcoming Third World Sociological Congress in Amsterdam. After participation of Soviet delegation in this forum, Soviet scientists started to use the concept “concrete sociological research”. The Constituent Assembly of the Soviet Sociological Association was held on December 19, 1957, consisting of five institutes of the Academy of Sciences (Osipov 2009, 84, 88). Soviet terminology referred to Marxist sociology as the only one that should be promoted. This terminology was used also in the meeting of

the Public Sciences Department of the Academy of Sciences of Latvia in 1961. It elected a Scientific Council in Sociology of the Institute of Economy. The conference was used as a platform that gave signal to local party committees and municipalities and other Soviet structures to initiate sociological research (Sočņevs 1961, 4). Among Soviet scholars who participated in the 3rd Congress of Sociologists in Amsterdam (in 1956) there was also Fricis Deglavs, a member of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR, a professional Communist activist who had worked in the Comintern before and was skilled in languages. After returning back from the symposium he criticised Western sociology as deideologised and descriptive. In the 5th Congress in Washington Valentīns Šteinbergs took part. Šteinbergs was the rector of the State University of Latvia. Earlier, in 1959, he had an article in the multivolume history of philosophy where he criticised the view that sociology could be outside politics. He was elected in the Council of the International Association of Sociologists (Tabuns 2010, 105–106).

From time to time, statistics on religious groups appeared in the 1950s, too. For example, in the Latvian translation of papers read in the seminar on atheism in Moscow, information is given on the proportion of women among Baptists in Moscow – it reaches 80%, among Adventists – up to 90% (Kļibanovs 1958, 390). However, no details of research behind these figures are provided. Some of Soviet researchers used sociological methods without referring to sociology. Dzidra Meikšāne wrote her Candidate in Pedagogy Dissertation (defended in 1965 in Moscow) on scientific atheism in schools based on questionnaires and analysis of interaction between teachers and pupils. It was quite time-consuming – there were in total 2420 respondents in 10 urban and 24 rural schools. She also used materials like letters of students to their religious peers, relatives, friends and literary heroes and information gained in individual and collective meetings in schools and data from biographies of religious students and former believers. This research was done over 12 years (1953–1965), mainly in Latgale but also in Ventspils, Alsunga and Skaistkalne. Sociology as such is not mentioned, however the method of observation known

in anthropology and sociology is used. Some of the questions asked were problematic in context of systematic discrimination of believers – for example, “who of your students is under the influence of religion”, “who of your students is religiously neutral” (Mejkshane, 1965, 9). This kind of information could be used against these students.

Surveys became a common way to find out people’s attitudes to many issues, including religion. For example, newspapers in 1964 reported on student surveys in schools aimed at finding out about students’ religiosity. This type of research was something new because following the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1936, which opposed research “with uncritically adopted bourgeois methods”, the study of students’ opinions was stopped (LNA-LVA, 479-1-76, 13). Results showed that some of children admitted that they are believers and some had believing parents (Barkāns 1964, 4). Soviet educators also learned that involvement of children in atheist activities does not always mean that all active participants are atheists. In some cases, believers also participated in anti-religious plays or had atheist presentations. Therefore, the task of Soviet educators was to use a variety of methods to determine the growth of student atheist convictions (Meikšāne 1963, 17).

Soviet scholars and their supervisors were cautious about sociology even in years after the Khrushchev era ended. In 1967 a translation of the book originally written by Genadiy Ashin in 1965 (Ašins, 1967) was published in Latvian. It was a critique of ‘bourgeois sociology’. It is ironic that the author devotes one chapter of his book to the critique of theories on personality cults (M. Weber on charisma, etc.) (Ašins 1967, 158). The Soviet system had experienced a quasi-religious cult of Stalin and in the 1960s the cult of Lenin was still flourishing. The author probably would have an answer to this criticism because according to him “an outstanding personality is one who has progressively influenced the development of history” (Ašins 1967, 163). Western sociologists were criticised by Soviet scholars as idealists who defend religion instead of opposing it. Historian Sergey Tokarev criticised Durkheim but he was more balanced than Ashin – “the positive impact provided by Durkheim and his school should

be tolerated” (Tokarevs 1958, 169). In 1966 Pēteris Zeile, a philosopher and art critic, characterised the state of sociology in Soviet Latvia as provincial and backward and stated that disciplines like philosophy and scientific atheism cannot exist without sociological research (Zeile 1966, 145). In 1967, Zigmunds Balevics who specialized in critique of Catholicism wrote an article in *Cīņa*. He criticized Western sociology but at the same time positively evaluated the role of sociology – “sociological knowledge is indispensable for everyone to live intelligently, purposefully, so that sometimes it is not unnecessary to waste resources and energy” (Balevics 1966, 2). Results of some of surveys showed that religiosity still exists also in younger generation. As written by one teacher in Kalupe, “everyone has a pioneer’s tie. So everyone should think the same. It turns out the situation is completely different. Not everyone thinks the same” (Averjanova 1964, 2).

### Planetariums as tools for promoting scientific achievements

During the Khrushchev era, planetariums were considered to be one of the most effective forms of propaganda of the scientific world-view. If in the early 1950s, 13 planetariums existed, in 1973 there were more than 70. Many of them were housed in former church buildings (The Orthodox Cathedral in Riga is one of the examples). During Khrushchev’s atheist campaign, the goal was to open a planetarium in every major city of the USSR. The planetariums served as a venue for lectures, gatherings of youth astronomy groups, film screenings and other events (Smolkin 2018, 3).

At the beginning, the plan was to build a new building designed for a planetarium in Old Riga – a medieval part of the city. Newspaper *Liesma* (Flame) in 1957 reported that a year later construction work should start (Jauns planetārijs 1957, 4). However, in 1958 it was announced that the beginning of work would be postponed until 1959 and for the time being the planetarium would be situated in the Palace of Pioneers, a medieval

castle in the Old Town (Planetārijs pagaidām atradīsies Pionieru pili 1958, 2). An idea to build a planetarium in the medieval part of the city was criticised because the building would be of a different style. Besides, there was big density of buildings in the Old Town and therefore the traffic would be jeopardised (Piemērotākā vieta 1958, 4). Eventually, the planetarium was moved to the former cathedral. Not surprisingly in the highly bureaucratic Soviet system, the reconstruction works of the cathedral were delayed, for which Alexander Sakharov, Plenipotentiary of the Council for Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in Latvia, in June 1962 complained to the Party and the government leadership that despite the decision by the Council of Ministers to reconstruct the building (13.10.1961) nothing happened, only crosses had been removed from the domes. According to the Plenipotentiary, this delay gave believers a basis for negative statements about the attitude of the Soviet authorities towards religion and that was spreading also outside Riga (LNA-LVA, PA-101-25-86, 85–87). His letter reveals the main reason why the cathedral was taken from the Orthodox Church – the goal was to weaken the Church as well as to establish the centre of atheist education in Latvia (LNA-LVA, PA-101-25-86, 86). Finally, the reconstruction works started. The rebuilt interiors were a good example of Soviet modernism, designed by young architect Juris Skalbergs. Later the architect considered that the only place where he managed to preserve something of the feeling of the former church, was the café (Zvirgzdiņš 2015). This place, popularly known as the ear of God, gathered bohemians of that time. This fact is another manifestation of the contradictions of the Soviet period: in the building, which was intended to serve Soviet propaganda, an alternative space was created. We cannot define Soviet system of that period as totalitarian because in spite of all attempts it was impossible to eliminate alternatives. Not only churches but also youth cultures are examples of these trends. This was an unwanted result of contradictions between the desire of Soviet authorities to show their openness to the West and efforts to control people's lives.

In most of articles about the new planetarium in Riga its previous use as a church is not mentioned. For example, in the article about the

opening of the planetarium in 1964 published in *Rīgas Balss* (Voice of Riga) a journalist contrasted the past with the bright present without any hint to the history of the building. “The former gloomy building in Komunāru Square has become bright, it will serve science and technical progress and social science propaganda” (Starprepublikāniskis ateistu seminārs 1964, 1). Even in the specialized journal *Māksla* (Arts) the former use of the building is not mentioned, the reader is only told, “the contradiction between the old building shell and the new spatial content is unresolved” (Driba, Šusts 1964, 30). Readers find out about the previous use of the building in *Dadzis* (Thistle), a satiric magazine. An old lady and a young boy are talking with the former cathedral in the background. She is complaining, “there will be no more talk of heaven.” The boys answers, “Will tell though, but only the truth!” (Pie (topošā) planetārija 1962, 8). One of a few articles that points to the fact that only recently it was a church was published in *Padomju Jaunatne* (Soviet Youth). Sharp contrast before the past and near future when the reconstructed building will be opened is made – “The workers decided to turn the old temple of mysticism and deception into a castle of sciences” (Kā top “mākslīgās debesis”?).

## Conclusion

Instead of the state-supported religious monopoly the Soviet regime promoted its ideology, scientific atheism, through massive campaigns, rituals of Soviet political religion, educational system. Atheism was inextricably tied to the Communist ideology, The inability of ideology to gain trust of the majority of people turned into the failure of scientific atheism to have lasting impact on Soviet citizens. “Scientific atheists believed that their technological and scientific successes would obviously disprove the validity of religion because the two are fundamentally in opposition (..) One can think of this as a strong albeit naive version of secularization theory. The naiveté in scientific atheism comes from a completely materialistic or literal understanding of religious concepts” (Froese 2004, 46).



Close ties of scientific atheism with state ideology meant that it was inevitably repressive. For example, the report on the current state of atheist propaganda (in 1959) written by J. Kalnbērziņš, the Secretary of Communist Party in Latvia, is a mix of propaganda and repressive measures (trial of clergy for teaching faith to children (LNA-LVA, PA-101-22-86, 67)).

Scientific atheism in the Khrushchev era reached the phase of high institutionalization, building on legacy of pre-war League of Militant Atheists. It was different from the approach of the old-style Soviet atheists like Anatolij Lunacharskij who in 1920 opposed a proposal to establish a department “for combating with religious prejudices” (Dunaevskij, Zel’dovich 1972, 453). His argument was that it could in some cases even increase these prejudices and that it is enough to use education for teaching atheism.

There were serious limitations to what Soviet scholars of religious studies were able to say. They were often involved in the propaganda work because it was the only way to justify their academic interest in studying religion. Due to ideological directives, Soviet researchers had to consider secularisation as “a process of liberation from religion” (a formulation found in the syllabus of the study course “Basics of scientific atheism” (Zinātniskā ateisma pamatu kursa programma 1973, 6)). The list of literature given at the end of the syllabus includes none of the books written by religious studies scholars, only ‘classics’ of Marxism-Leninism and documents of the Communist Party.

Attempts to find a balance between propaganda and scholarly work were not new. Before the Second World War, Alexander Lukachevskij, one of the leaders of atheist movement in the USSR, said that the task is “to raise anti-religious propaganda to scientific heights” (Antonov 2014, 66). However, even according to his view, scientific goals should be subject to ideological ones. He justified the need to strengthen the role of scientific atheism with Stalin’s ‘dogma’ about the intensification of class struggle in the conditions of communism. This situation, he said, calls for more attention to be paid to combating religion (Antonov 2014, 67).

Involvement in scientific atheism was a form of collaborationism because inevitably concessions to the Soviet ideology had to be made. Collaborationism is a term that in Latvia is often used in a narrow sense – involvement in mass repressions (Jansons 2011). This results in a tendency to avoid talking about Latvian collaborationism or in notorious court cases like the one against historian Gatis Lapiņš in 2018 (Spriedums 2018).<sup>3</sup> It does not help in healing traumatic memories of the Soviet period. Alternative would be to use the term in a much broader sense and to talk about various types of collaborationism (Hoffmann 1968, 375–395; Drapac, Pritchard 2015, 865–891). The term has negative connotations but the Soviet life was a mix of efforts to live a normal everyday life and of constant coping with consequences of the pretense and adjustment to realities of the closed political system.

In the 1960s Soviet officials also intensified attempts to provide atheism with more positive content – not only something to stand against, but also something to stand for. Archive files of the Knowledge Society contain many lectures on atheism and secular alternatives to services provided by churches. For developing of these alternatives, the Council of Atheists in Latvia who worked under auspices of the Knowledge Society had a special division called the Sector of New Everyday Traditions and Rituals. For example, in 1964 this group published a manuscript of limited use that contains a scenario for organising the adulthood rite in a rural village. It includes all details necessary for official Soviet festivities like speeches by old revolutionaries, local representatives of Komsomol, the Chairperson of a collective farm etc. (LNA-LVA, 479-1-81, 1.–13). These ‘secular liturgies’ are interesting examples of how religious ideas and practices are transformed to fit the purposes of secular ideologies. However, like atheist propaganda in general they have only limited success because of their formal and highly ideological character.

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<sup>3</sup> Decision made by lower court (judge Arnis Naglis in the town of Ogre) which in argumentation includes references to Wikipedia and the book published in Soviet period was later annulled by a higher court.

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Māra Kiope

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## **“HAVE WE NOT LIVED IN DARKNESS?”: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF ‘SOVIET SPIRITUALITY’ IN LATVIA (1964–1991)**

*The title of the article uses a paraphrase of the lyrics of a popular Latvian song of the late Soviet-era. It tells that the life of the people during the Soviet era took place in spiritual darkness, but in spite of that, resistance was burning in Latvian culture. To a large extent, this has been determined by the European cultural heritage, which was characteristic of the pre-war Latvian state. During the Soviet regime, it allowed to escape identification with the Soviet civilization. Unlike many studies on Soviet reality in the fields of economics, politics, history, ideology and sociology, the project currently carried out by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia (LZP-20202\_0058) which includes this article focuses on the study of ‘Soviet spirituality’. A serious research problem is the definition of the concept of ‘Soviet spirituality’, as Soviet science has never explained the concept of ‘spirituality’.*

*In the 1960s, in order to distance itself from the old Stalinist totalitarianism, the Communist Party began to pay special attention to spiritual values. However, ‘Soviet spirituality’ cannot be reduced to the everyday manifestations, to some research in psychology, or to ideology, because it is undoubtedly related to the realities that fall within the competence of theology, religious studies, and philosophy. Namely, the creation of a new Soviet man who would have abolished the constant human anthropological nature, the conversion of a priori religiosity into idolatry, the use of feelings and emotions to create a controlled mood in society, rituals and initiation practices to legitimize the existing power structures.*

*The article proposes cognitive theory as the most appropriate methodological tool for describing the phenomenon of ‘Soviet spirituality’. Thus, cognitive theory provides an*

*approach to understanding spirituality, and allows explaining the resistance of Latvian culture to Soviet identification. Theoretical equipment is applicable to case studies, as they clearly reveal the nature and contradictions of 'Soviet spirituality' in Latvia.*

*Keywords: 'Soviet spirituality', Homo Sovieticus, socialist rituals, masses' mood, Latvian SSR*

The title of the article quotes words from a popular Latvian pop song of the late 1980s, when Latvian society was already starting the Singing Revolution as a protest form against the Soviet occupation. During the era of the Soviet Communist Party general-secretary Gorbachev (1985–1991) when openness (*glasnost*) and the efforts to restore the Soviet system (*perestroika*) were taking place, the so-called Soviet 'national outskirts' at last wanted justice in the solution of the 'national question'. In the case of Latvia, as well as of other Baltic States, this desire could have been satisfied with the restoration of state independence which had been lost as a result of the Soviet occupation (1940–1941; 1944–1991). The semantics of light and darkness were used to describe Latvian life in the Soviet regime without naming it. The classic Latvian choral song 'Castle of Light' of the National Romanticism period, composed by Jāzeps Vītols in 1899 and performed at almost every Latvian song festival, acquired a new symbolic meaning in the Soviet times: the Castle of Light, which will rise again from the depths of darkness marked a faint but unfading hope to restore the Latvian state. In turn, the quoted lyrics of the song of the late 1980s indicates that there is an internal rift as a result of morally evil impact of the double-life practice that took place under the influence of 'Soviet spirituality': we are the ones who have lived in darkness for a long time and now we must strive for light; can we though?

New research perspectives of Sovietization deviate from and challenge the standard narrative of Sovietization as a top-down process imposed by Moscow-directed military and political rule and a centrally planned economy: "These new perspectives of Sovietization analyse gender messages, memory, the cultural tools of Sovietization, and how the choices of

ordinary people shaped and enacted Sovietization” (Obertreis, 2016, 462). In the context of such a research perspective, it is also appropriate to study ‘Soviet spirituality’ in Latvia. Sonja Luerhmann has already shown the benefits of using the concept of spirituality:

“As a term that crosses religious and secular realms of meaning, ‘spirituality’ is an important quality of the persons and social relations that each group imagines itself to be producing be it through didactic spectacle or religious liturgy. The differences in what each side mean by the term reveal various strategies of managing the risks of transformation manifesting in very different sights, sounds, and movements” (Luehrmann, 2011, 164).

It is thought that the epistemological approach could be very suitable for analysis of spirituality in the context of cognitive phenomenology. Thus, this article will analyse the construct of ‘spirituality’ in the Soviet ideological discourse followed by examining the main directions of the implementation of this phenomenon in Latvia.

### Construct of ‘spirituality’ in the Soviet ideological discourse

Every human being has some spiritual experience in the epistemic sense, because the human mind could reveal the very existence of the non-material, spiritual world in the self like the possibility of the mind to know intelligible quiddities, to reflect and make judgments. Also, we can mention “volition acts, feelings, confidence about inner freedom, about the continuing identity during life-time, which has its foundation in the substantial spiritual principle, the soul” (Ladusāns, 1996, 22–23). Consequently, every human being has a religious dimension regardless of his/her belonging or abstinence to one or another institutionalized form of religion; truly existential dimension of human life. Apparently, the Soviet atheist regime denied the Christian tradition, which for centuries had cultivated human’s *a priori* religiosity in the human nature by turning it to the transcendent – the living and personalistic God.

In 'Soviet spirituality' the Soviet state becomes a religious idolatry object, to which the person's existential religiosity is attracted:

"Inherent to Communism is a belief that all things, including people, belong to the State. If we belong to the State as an ultimate master, then we no longer belong to God. Communist societies are intrinsically materialist and see progress only measurable by material equity. Thus, all members of the society are seen as potential resource accumulating lemmings, rather than unique persons made in the image and likeness of God. This insistence on production turns the person and the family into a cog in the wheel of Socialism" (Hall, 2019).

In his turn, bishop Cuthbert M. O'Gara, C.P., of Yuanling, China, who was imprisoned by the Red Chinese from 1951 to 1953 and later expelled from China reveals the following: "The State is the god of the communist and all citizens must be led by the Violent Alpha. With its materialistic and atheist world view, Communism ultimately treats man as an animal, nothing more than cattle to be culled and used for the good of the state which trumpets the supposed progress of man and society" (O'Gara, 1967). However, the worship of the state as an impersonal substance paradoxically expressed itself in the cult of human personalities: the leaders of the Communist Party, labor heroes, and cosmonauts - the pantheon of all the Soviet deities. In the narrowest sense of the term, this is exactly the 'Soviet spirituality' as a phenomenon of political religion's 'spirituality'. However, it is not just a specific spirituality at a certain stage in history, marked by the beginning and end dates of the Soviet state.

Soviet atheism appeared to be a political tool to achieve the main goal of the Soviet social experiment: to elaborate a new type of human in whom the likeness to the God Creator would be annihilated. A Belarusian Nobel Prize winner in Literature 2015 for her "polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time" Svetlana Alexievich writes:

“Communism had an insane plan: to remake the ‘old breed of man’, ancient Adam. And it really worked... Perhaps it was Communism’s only achievement. Seventy-plus years in the Marxist-Leninist laboratory gave rise to the new man: *Homo Sovieticus*. Some see him as a tragic figure, others call him a *sovok*.<sup>1</sup> [...] People who have come out of socialism are both like and unlike the rest of humanity – we have our own lexicon, our own conceptions of good and evil, our heroes, our martyrs. We have a special relationship with death. The stories people tell me are full of jarring terms: ‘shoot’, ‘execute’, ‘liquidate’, ‘eliminate’, or typically Soviet varieties of disappearance such as ‘arrest’, ‘Ten years without the right of correspondence’, and ‘emigration’. How much can we value human life when we know that not long ago people had died by the millions?” (Alexievich, 2020, 7).

Sociologists of the Yuri Levada Analytical Center in Moscow point out that in reality we are dealing with an interesting human construction and although real people are different from the construction, so to speak, in all th directions, still the Soviet human is focused solely on the physical survival of himself and his loved ones, so he has no moral except of the ‘concentration camp imperative’ here: ‘You die today, I will tomorrow’. For the sake of survival, it is possible to compromise of any kind (Lenta RU, 2019). It is a person shaped up by the state institutions and depending on them, because the state legitimizes itself with paternalistic care for the people, providing the guarantees promised by socialism, thus giving confidence in the future and social optimism; a man with a sense of historical mission, which is in fact an ideology of imperial supremacy, military might, constant struggle against hostile surroundings, and isolationism. Adaptation to the state regime inevitably leads to ambiguity, hypocrisy, cynicism, adjusting to power, and the bowing in front of the leader, which has resources. Therefore, *Homo Sovieticus* empirically described by the

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<sup>1</sup> “This is a widely used pejorative term for one who adheres to Soviet values, attitudes and behaviors. The word can also refer to the Soviet Union itself. It is a pun on the word for ‘dustpan’.” Translator’s note. In Svetlana Alexievich. *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*. Random House: N.Y., 2016, p. 3

Levada-Center sociologists is "a divided man, a man of frustration. Only with the appearance of a different type of person could one hope for social change" (Trudolyubov, 2019).

From the epistemic point of view, Christian anthropology is used in Soviet 'soul engineering' but changed. Namely, in the classical St. Apostle Paul's soul-body-spirit trichotomy, which is preserved in the Orthodox theological anthropology, the Holy Spirit is replaced by the 'Soviet spirit' – by this invisible but real spiritual force produced through ideology. The observation of Sergei Bulgakov says a lot, when he in 1918 describes revolutionary soldiers and sailors: "Pay attention to how even the appearance of a soldier has changed - he has become like a beast, he is terrible, especially a sailor. I will admit to you that 'comrades' seem to me to be beings **who have no spirit at all and who have only the lowest soul faculties**<sup>2</sup>, as if a special kind of Darwinian monkey - *homo socialisticus*" (Bulgakov, 1918). In this quote, the Russian philosopher has recorded a fundamental anthropological change - a person who is an embodied spirit – is guided now by the 'Soviet spirit'. Atheist regime destroyed or silenced the living witnesses and transmitters of the Christian spiritual tradition; the system of total atheism and propaganda distracted people from understanding of spiritual processes. From now on, all the machinery of spiritual production of the Soviet system is focused on the activation of the lower faculties of the soul if to repeat Bulgakov's evaluation; on the engineering of the soul: "The exact meaning of this language formula leads to a primitive scheme, according to which the mysterious, enigmatic and unimaginable soul of human is only a mechanism that must be regulated, corrected if it is broken, and also improved to become more purposeful and productive" (Sarnov, 2005, 214).

In this context regulation of the lowest faculties of the human soul becomes the main tool of the 'Soviet spirituality'. Instead of the intelligibility of the senses, which is a characteristic feature of human cognition, the intellect in 'Soviet spirituality' is determined and subjected to the

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis by the author of the article.

senses. The sense of smell acquires a symbolic status in Soviet society. Myasnikova points out that from the very beginning, the Soviet Cultural Revolution struggled with the ubiquitous bad smell (*durnoy zapakh*) as a symbolic odour of the 'old life' in the physical sense – by introducing hygiene norms. But over time, the 'smell' became a landmark of social life – the Soviet human had to be able to 'smell' (*nyukh*) from where trouble comes in order to avoid it; it was necessary 'to 'smell' what exactly had to be done for career development through education, functioning in the Communist party and exemplary socialistic work' (Myasnikova, 2016, 383).

To control the individual, the 'Soviet spirit' is hidden behind ideological constructions, but it is the real spiritual force which manipulates the mass through tools of the mood guidance, and operates with just the lowest faculties of the soul: "Mood [*nastroenie*] was also a very important concept for the Soviet state from the Civil War years onward" (Evans, 2015, paragraph 8). Mood was not a measure to diagnose the attitude of the masses, but the "spread of an affective atmosphere" in which a young Soviet man should live and feel – thus a "tool for the formation of a new Soviet human" (Holquist, 1997).

'Mass' was such an important concept because at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, many social theorists and politicians thought of building a society in line with industrial civilization. In particular, it was emphasized that for the common good, individuals should merge with the collective, perhaps even to be 'melted' in it. During the First World War, mass politics and work with the masses became relevant: research and influencing the mood, psychological and physical mobilization of the masses. Hoffmann notes that in Russia, the Bolsheviks who came to power solved the issue of mass politics through political propaganda and censorship, monopolizing the tools of mass mobilization – wartime methods were used effectively and became permanent in the Soviet state (Hoffmann, 2014, 295–312). Ideologically, the *bogostroitelstvo* movement in Russia from which many influential actors of the early Soviet state emerged, resonated with the 'mass' paradigm of industrialization strivings: based on Wilhelm Ostwald's energetics philosophy it sought not to seek

the transcendent God, but to find the divine in the power of collective. *Bogostroitelstvo* is also echoed, for example, by Bogdanov's tectology, which, based on physical philosophy of Ernst Mach, taught the unshakable belief in the social unit that subordinates individuals, the totality of which each element, i. e. the individual is enriched and supplemented with the properties of such a system (Bogdanov, 1989).

Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili in his reflection about Soviet mentality (Mamardashvili, 2000) recalls that the source of evil is a hate to the human being, which is so finite, so imperfect, so weak in comparison to an imaginary ideal. Non-acceptance of human reality creates 'hysteria of possibility of the ideal', of a world in which people are protected from violence, suffering and oppression. Every revolutionary is dreaming of an unreal world or paradise on the Earth, which somehow turns people's lives into hell. Because the experimental making of the new perfect human being which could be worth of the new world practically presupposes to fuse 'pure', ideal elements into a single social body – a commune in socialism or *fascio*, the bundle in a fascists' state. Mamardashvili suggests imagining an aggregation of human bodies burning with an alchemically transforming fire, converting these bodies into a 'pure substance' in which a new type of human being is born: "When the fire of common birth erases the differences between soul and body, thinking and reality, the higher and the lower, it will certainly manifest itself in a hysterical state." Then, even though we actually live in the finite world, we are striving for the 'infinity of nonsense'. One of the most visible representatives of *bogostroitelstvo*, the Commissar of Enlightenment, declared: "Each molecule – human person – hits on all sides, pushes on neighbours and throws chaotically, disorderly. To organize these molecules, to give them a common direction, purpose, order – that's the thing! And when the will of the people is organized in a unit, will act as a coordinated set of energies (*soglasovanny puchok energii*), then nothing will be able to resist it" (Lunacharsky, 1928). Although the People's Commissar in his lecture criticizes Aleksei Gastev, Director of Central Institute of Labor (CIT) in Moscow for the exaggerated 'proletarian poetic fantasy' that the weak



human person will be fully replaced by machines, Gastev is the one who elaborated theory of mass mobilization in line with the Soviet industrialization – theory of the scientific organization of labour (*nauchnaya organizatsiya truda*). Gastev was, indeed, a poet of futuristic mode and his poetry energetically celebrates industrialization, announcing an era of a new type of human, trained by the overall mechanization of everyday life. Gastev in fact seeks answer in respect to spiritual force: what idea must be thrown into the masses so that it can quickly perform its own inner self-processing for to increase industrial power of the state? Thus Gastev develops an algorithm for directing the mood, feelings of the mass, which must lead to the emerging of the mindset of the new Soviet human<sup>3</sup> (Gastev, 1972). Although the Soviet regime sought the source of the power of human mass control in the spiritual world of esoteric and occult forces.<sup>4</sup> In most of the cases, as notes Péter Krasztev, the Communist Party leaders were motivated by the curiosity to find out how hitherto unknown forces of

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<sup>3</sup> 1) Physical strength – strength without any symbolic meaning – must be the decisive driving force of all the social and cultural progress; *physical strength* must be respected, encouraged, nurtured so that the masses learn to admire its brutal power; 2) sense of physical strength has to create *work* – muscles have to work methodically, and therefore the recreational science is also needed; 3) the most important idea of culture must be *flexibility* – it is the art of constructing body's movements, their regulation developed to microscopic precision, and it is the most important feature of the century, which must have classes that want not to die but to strike; 4) courage (*khvabrost*) inevitably grows from these elements: the skill to make a blow when indecision must be overcome; 5) as a result of long socio-political exercises, vigilance (*zorkost*) and a savage-like ability to hunt footprints (*sledopytstvo*) will be developed for the new Soviet human could be able to perform sophisticated tricks in the battle; 6) assembler skills – to learn to quickly assemble, construct, invent, and find solutions using everyday imagination and trained memory. All these qualities make up organizational readiness (*organizatsionnaya snorovka*) to act in a constantly changing economic struggle. An army of physically, psychologically and organizationally strong men should be formed from the lowest social strata, mainly from the working youth

<sup>4</sup> See: B. G. Rosenthal (Ed.). *The occult in Russian and Soviet culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Osterrieder, M. (2012). *From synarchy to Shambhala: The role of political occultism and social messianism in the activities of Nicholas Roerich*. In M. Hagemeister, B. Menzel, & B. G. Rosenthal (Eds.). *The New Age of Russia: Occult and esoteric dimensions*. Munich: Sagner, pp. 101–134.

nature could be used to rout out the enemy, both external (the 'imperialists') and internal ('deviant' people), and they were ready to devote financial resources to this aim: "These leaders exploited occult phenomena and took them seriously" (Krasztev, 2019, 40).

Similarly but more naïve efforts have been attempted by mankind since prehistoric times, when Indian sankhya-yoga, for example, developed methods for transforming man so that the individual beginning merged with cosmic power. With the Christian anthropology it becomes clear that the third divine person, the Holy Spirit, implements the highest faculties of the human mind (*nous* in the terminology of St. Paul; purified/blessed mind in the Western or the Eastern Christian terminology respectively). But the designers of 'Soviet spirit' were convinced that the spiritual faculty in human mind could be easily replaced by the ideology which should follow destruction of Christian spirituality. Do Soviet epigones of De Trassi's<sup>5</sup> became aware of that they are producing ideology as a false consciousness, or is this exactly what they wanted to do?

Soviet science has not been able to define spirituality. Even social psychology, which was the only science allowed to study the 'spiritual' as the product of the brain activity, made definitions of spirituality as logical linguistic derivatives from the dogmatic declarations of the historical materialism, like: "Spiritual activity is a cognitive process aimed at theoretical knowledge of nature, society, and man himself; this cognition, undoubtedly, is only a reflection of material activity in consciousness, which, in turn, has the so-called properties of anticipatory reflection, which allow you to form in your head the mindsets of unfinished projects" (Orlov, 1986, 9). In other words, there is no special spiritual experience in which content, ideas and abstractions are formed independently of the material environment, the "gnoseology of Bolshevism is the so-called

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<sup>5</sup> Antoine Luis de Tracy on June 20, 1796, declared the science of ideas and their influence on politics or ideology to be the most actual and the most significant science. Later, in his work 'German Ideology', Karl Marx treats De Trassi's thesis on ideology as class consciousness, noting that 'ideology is a reflection and expression of the hegemony of the ruling class in consciousness' (Kennedy, 1979, 355).

Lenin's 'picture theory' that consciousness simply copies reality" (Ladusāns, 1955, 7).

Spiritual life in Soviet scientific literature is described simply as a kind of production, which takes place as a "process of origin, spread and manifestation of human forms of social consciousness in material life" (Sverchkova, 1988, 13-14), whereas an individual is defined as the subject of the spiritual production. In fact, "spiritual production is the formation of communist consciousness in the masses" (Pulatov 1971, 245). "The spiritual development of society is led and directed by the Communist Party through ideological upbringing, as socialism is historically developing and therefore new adjustments in spiritual production and development are constantly needed to bring it into line with communist ideology" (Starchenko, 1983, 40), because "the Communist ideology is a key factor in spiritual life" (Biyekenov, 1982, 34).

According to the hermeneutical approach, it could be said that 'narratives' which are created in ideology are pretexts (German: *Prätexzte*). These are communicative expressions, which, however, are incomprehensible if we even would grasp the meaning embedded in it. The pretexts should be interpreted exactly on the basis of what these texts did not intend to convey at all, for example, the critique of ideological texts demands to find out what interests are actually masked behind these supposedly texts (Gadamer, 1989, 39). Consequently, the complex form of expression of ideological formulas always is only a sign, which denotes the Soviet spirit<sup>6</sup> in accordance with which a person must live, work and create. 'Spiritual conformity' of the individual in the Soviet context would be a rather vague concept, but in praxis the Communist Party diagnoses person's 'conformity' with unquestionable conviction and security.

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<sup>6</sup> 'A spirit can be an anonymous force responsible for the atmosphere in a meeting of people, or for the mood within a person, it can also be as personal as the spirit of other people who shape our daily actions. It is called a spirit because it relates not to matter but to mind, soul, and feelings. Spirits can be loving, harmless or dangerous, fleeting or powerful, discreet or haunting, helping or hurting. They can inhabitate places, memories, books, or people.' Arnold Neumaier. *Gedanken zum Leben als Christ*. <https://www.mat.univie.ac.at/~neum/faith.html>

Therefore, one can agree in part with the statement that "ideology replaces spirituality" (Myasnikova, 2016, 381), but in cognitive context, autonomous intellectual habit for seeking the Truth is replaced by a habit of using the 'set of references' to justify selfish and morally questionable behaviour, even violent and inhumane actions inspired by the 'Soviet spirit'. It could be embodied in persons, thus to be *spiritus incarnatus* and might recognize itself or its' absence in other persons, and to push, to inspire the subjected person to use the system machine against the other human being, which is 'alien' to this spirit. It feeds from the ideology in the people's minds which open themselves to the impact of this spirit. Process of mutual exchange between the Soviet human and the 'Soviet spirit' through ideology makes the Soviet 'faith' religious, which we can observe in fanatical manifestations. Václav Havel notes that the most striking feature of the Communist dictatorship is its ideology, which is logically arranged, universal and very flexible, "acquiring the character of a secularized religion, because it offers a ready answer to any question, requires complete obedience, and is deeply absorbed in human existence. And it has a hypnotically suggestive appeal in an age characterized by a crisis of metaphysical and existential values, human degradation, alienation and the disappearance of the meaning of existence, as it offers a readily available 'refuge' in which everything becomes clear again, anxiety and loneliness recede.<sup>7</sup> But cheap 'shelter' is expensive, demanding the giving up thinking, conscience and responsibility" (Havel, 1978, VII).

Overall, 'Soviet spirituality' could be described as the participation of a human being in the 'Soviet spirit' and at the same time it is the participation in the Soviet mass, which is the machine of shaping up the new Soviet human. But significant events take place where one tends to break out of this participation in a creative individual way. Or even entire nations and societies turn out to be in conflict with such participation – this is the case of Latvia.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf.: "I bought three newspapers and each has its own truth. Where is the real truth? Before you read the newspaper 'Pravda' ('The Truth') in the morning, and you know everything. You understood everything" (Alexievich, 2020).

## Sovietization of Western Spirituality in Latvia

By the Soviet re-occupation (1944), Latvian society could not fail to have an irreconcilable conflict between two completely different, opposite kinds of participation and spirituality. In the beginning of the Cold War, Latvia like other Baltic States, was undoubtedly looked upon as the “outpost of Western Europe, which received its religion and civilization from the West” (Roucek, 1949, 171–172). After the Proclamation of Independence of the Republic of Latvia on 18 November 1918, the state practices in the field of culture in Latvia like in another Baltic country, Estonian Republic, “were typical to those nation-states of Western liberal democracies, where cultural institutional network originated from the national and cultural emancipation and initiatives of the 19th century civil society” (Kulbok-Lattik, 2014, 161–162). Similarly, during the Soviet regime (1940–1941; 1944–1991) Western modern development in the Baltic States was replaced by Soviet state practices. However, the very core of the Sovietization of Western spirituality in Latvia was the introduction of an atheist regime whose task was to destroy people’s understanding of participation in the divine spirit – which has always been the center of the Western/Christian spiritual tradition – so that it could be replaced by the Soviet one. From an epistemic point of view, it was a task to eradicate the pre-understanding which serves for grasping and evaluation of the reality as well as for transmitting of the tradition. This would be evidenced by the main intertwined lines of Sovietization: the replacement of Church rituals by socialist rituals and the eradication of the awareness and memories of Latvian interwar statehood or the fight against ‘nationalism’.

The Communist Party nomenclature in the late Soviet period (1964–1991) made a shift from the previous Stalinist military and mechanistic totalitarianism to *moral engineering* (Gestva, 2018, 65): people were hoping for a gradual improvement in life and tried to ignore their political inability to participate in the governance of the state and society. Spiritual terminology and references began to be used in particular. Thus

Khrushchev's campaigns on morality in families and workplaces, especially the fight against drinking and hooliganism were described as a concern for strengthening the 'spiritual values' (*dukhovnyye tsennosti*) of the Soviet human (Luerhmann, 2011, 165–166). Religion, or rather the spiritual emptiness in the human soul that arose as a result of atheist regime, had to be replaced by something: the Soviet people wrote desperate letters to the Communist Party's officials asking to whom to turn to for consolation in the event of deep personal sorrow? – "Earlier priests used to be such persons, but now?" (SmolkinRothrock, 2014). Since it was necessary to show the advantages of socialism in terms of the possibilities of human self-realization in comparison with the "consumerism and inhumanity of capitalism" over the course of the 1960s and early 1970s, the "socialist way of life" in the Soviet Union came to be defined primarily in terms of emotion and "the Soviet way of life became a way of feeling" (Evans, 2015, 544)<sup>8</sup> for the people to *feel Soviet*. It is believable that ideology that became 'palpable' with senses in easy-to-understand posters, films, programs etc. created *Homo Sovieticus*, for whom these virtualizations have become almost bodily memories of the 'golden times of the superpower' in the post-Soviet time.

Soviet mood management was most successful in the praxis of the socialist ritualization. At least until 1956, as Smolkin–Rothrock writes, the creation of socialist rituals and ceremonies was not a priority political issue, but by the end of 1964, soon after the transfer of power from Khrushchev to Brezhnev, the Soviet leadership mobilized unprecedented resources to transform the beliefs and ritual practices of Soviet citizens. For several years, the idea of 'managing' the spiritual life and the creation of a 'socialist ritual' has become a priority, plenums and resolutions were dedicated to it, specialized committees and institutes were created, academic disciplines such as ethnography, sociology of religion were supported: "At its core, everything spun around the question of the future of

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<sup>8</sup> Evans notes, that the emotionality, which was now promoted, for example, in television programs, was equated precisely with the soulfulness (*dushevnost*).

religion and atheism within the Soviet modernity, around a strategy that would help effectively overcome religion and establish atheism; around the state policies to control the 'spiritual life' of citizens" (Smolkin-Rothrock, 2012, 434). Meanwhile in Latvia at least experimentally this strategy had been implemented already in the late 1950s. For example, in 1958, a Moscow ethnographer was observing the religious Candlelight evening in which the dead were commemorated, but, as she writes, so many people attending the event did not listen to the pastor. Then 'the voices called for the event to be taken away from the Church' and the next Memorial Day in 1959 was celebrated in a new, secular way. In fact the initiators of traditions were not the 'working-class masses' as one could read in the official publications of that time, or the local elite, but the highest representatives of the Soviet regime in Moscow. The developers of the new traditions were representatives of the local authorities, who attracted the local representatives of the cultural and science elites, among them ethnographers (Boldāne-Zeļenkova, 2019, 35).

Moscow ethnographer continues: "New rituals related to the human life cycle replace the religious ones: after the birth of a child, the parents are greeted with a card, and when they return home from the hospital, the representatives of the collective farm come to greet them"; also instead of the Confirmation in 1958 in many places in Latvia the Youth Celebration Day or Coming-of-age Festival (*prazdnik sovershennoletiya*) was established by the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Youth organization. In 1958 in Jēkabpils region 175 people participated in the Youth Day, in 1960 – 600, in 1961 – 1190 people (Terent'eva, 1966, 69; 71). Funeral rites were of special interest as they indicated a belief in Eternal Life. Statistics shows that in 1965 in the religious rites of the Latvian SSR 22772 persons were buried, while in the civic ceremony – 9161.<sup>9</sup> In 1982, statistics shows 6147 religious funerals and 24920 civic funerals.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile ideological observers noticed that it is difficult to impose completely

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<sup>9</sup> Latvia State Central Archive, f. N. 1419, op. No. 3, doc. N. 280.

<sup>10</sup> Latvia State Central Archive, f. N. 1419, op. No. 3, doc. N. 295.

new and unprecedented traditions, so "we have to face the fact that the old ones are still being transformed" the method must be such that the new tradition retains some of the old elements, such as exchanging rings in the wedding ritual, throwing three handfuls of land at a funeral, declaring that these are folk traditions that have nothing to do with religion' (Kampars, 1969, 19). Simultaneously the "dialectical problem of relationship between national and international" in Soviet Latvia rituals emerged as the new rituals somehow had reflected the traditional Latvian culture and practices and inevitably had brought with them a reminder of Latvia's statehood. For not to mention this historical fact, the condemning terminology of nationalism is used: "The special emphasis on the national character of traditions, festivals and rituals, regardless of its character – progressive or reactionary – leads to national fetishism, and ultimately to nationalism" (Kampars, 1969, 29). At the same time, national traditions re-referred to religion (Priede, 2015, 222). Paradoxically, in Latvia, in the new Soviet traditions their organizers tried to convey religious traditions, albeit in a secularized form. While the Moscow ethnographer celebrates the Soviet secular tradition of the Childhood Festival, which is organised instead of the Baptism sacrament and is adjusted to the Child Protection Day on June 1 (Terent'yeva, 1966, 69; 71), Latvian actress Vera Singajevska, the very famous organizer of the Childhood Festivals' performances, remembers:

"It all started with our children whom we wanted to baptize, but at that time the church was prohibited. We decided to act independently. The first Festival of Childhood took place in Ogre. Later, [my husband, actor] Tāļivaldis, and I began to be invited everywhere in Latvia. We often went with a quartet or ensemble. Candles, male voices, violins or flutes created a church-like feeling of holiness. It is difficult for a person to live without the feeling of holiness. There were also godfathers and godmothers, although at that time they were called 'public witnesses'. We were also invited to countless confirmations, which were then called the Festivals of Youth. We have also blessed many young couples. Yes, those were the years when an actor also had to be a pastor" (Rozniece, 1998).



Soviet ideology led power transmission through ritual, but rites created political reality via participation in 'Soviet spirit' through participation in rituals:

“The Soviet citizens through participation in rituals supposed to identify themselves with larger political Soviet forces that can only be seen in symbolic form. The inculcation of new communist holiday culture was related to the destruction of traditional chronotope and the construction of the foundation of new historical mythology, which became one of decisive factors in the formation of a new worldview” (Paukštytė-Šaknienė, 2011, 115).

Therefore, the invasion of the new Soviet rituals in the pre-understanding level of the human cognition uprooted the very European cultural cognitive structure of the human existence in time and in history: “Historical existence requires conscious human participation in the events of history’, but Soviet mentality was ahistorical” (Mamardashvili, 2004, 171). Cultural history of Latvia was rewritten in order to demonstrate atheism and materialism as inherent to Latvian culture; it was pictured as genuinely anticlerical. The previous culture heritage was declared to be under impact of “clerical ideology of German colonizers” (Mortuļevs, 1972, 5); the interwar independent state period was allowed to be represented only in form of critics of the ‘Fascist-ruled state’. Special Sovietization rites were applied even to every significant personality of Latvian culture, like Sovietization of Latvian poets Rainis and Aspazija by organization of their celebration and ideological messages (Zelče, 2021).

Soviet leaders would have liked that the words would change reality, as it is the case in the Holy Mass where the transubstantiation of the Wine and Bread into the Most Precious Blood and *Corpus Christi* takes place. Mikhail Heller discussing the Soviet language problem mentions that dissident writer Andrei Sinyavsky in one of his novels has depicted a political leader who had a magical ability to change matter with a word. In this case, he declared the river water to be alcohol, but those who drink it complaining as they are not intoxicated. Heller comments: “The Soviet

state [...] disseminates a 'reference set of views', acting in an organized, methodical and planned manner. The state determines the meaning of the word, the conditions of its use, creates a magical circle, which must enter everyone who wants to understand and be understood in the Soviet system" (Heller, 1994, 59). In the public sphere, many people adhered to the official rules of language and behavior, but essentially lived in their own private world, in everyday language: "Opinions, beliefs and living conditions that differed from official norms and values had to be hidden, and silence and whispering<sup>11</sup> became very important communicative practices" (Gestva, 2018, 58). In the case of the Third Reich,<sup>12</sup> as in the case of the new Soviet language (*novojaz*), writes Sarnov, the political jargon imposed by the authorities was a poison that people unconsciously absorbed: "Changing words and their emotional tone changes a person. Gradually getting used to application of the word in the new sense, a person unknowingly changes and becomes a different person" (Sarnov, 2005, 9). Significantly, the Soviet ideology language could not be equated with Russian: "*Homo Sovieticus* with different ethnic backgrounds were speaking this 'stolen Russian' – 'all-union' language, Sovietized remake of the Russian language" (Streičs, 2012, 228). Latvian people had an insurmountable dislike of Soviet language nonsense or 'mumbling', so the local ideological 'coaches' being aware of that had pointed out that ideological speeches must be prepared differently than it is customary in Soviet Russia: "Another characteristic disadvantage of many civic festivals and rituals is that they are filled with speeches and greetings that are similar to each other, here they are dry patterned, here, on the contrary, flooded with false pathos" (Kampars, 1969, 26).

On the every-day level the permanent clash of cultures was raised by encountering the Soviet negligence mentality in all the spheres of the human activity in Latvia, which was completely dissonant with the

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<sup>11</sup> See also: Orlando Figes. *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia*. Metropolitan Books, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> See: Victor Klemperer. *Lingua Tertii Imperii: Notizbuch eines Philologen*. 1947.

European way of life, attitudes, and understanding. Because of striving for “infinity of nonsense” we “do not have the strength to become historically effective to realize, and to do something to the end, to solve problems that have long had to be solved and understood; events seem to be unfolding, but in reality nothing happens and, even more so, nothing is implemented and completed”, notes Georgian philosopher Mamardashvili (Mamardashvili, 2000). Manifestations of the Soviet negligence mentality permeated the everyday sphere in the entire spectrum: from careless treatment of work to be done to irresponsible, pointless manifestations of human relationships; indeed, some presence of ‘infinity of nonsense’.

Such a panoramic background only contributed to the strengthening of the opposition in people’s consciousness, as the inner resistance of each new generation to nonsense gained support in the memories of the older generation about independent Latvia state and privately saved artifacts of its heritage, however gradually interwar Latvia Republic became more and more an idealized image. The authors of Latvian culture chose to do everything possible within the limits allowed by the authorities, so many Soviet-era Latvian cultural products can be interpreted both from the point of view of Soviet ideology (then) and (now) just as easily when looking to them from the position of perseverance in defense of the national memory and identity. Latvian artists, musicians, writers and cinematographers tried to break through the closed borders of the Soviet system and bring the experience of Western cultures into the culture of Soviet Latvia. This distinguished Latvian culture as offering other forms of participation and alienated it from ‘Soviet spirituality’. At the same time, it created moral parallelism or the so-called double life, which caused cognitive confusion and led to the obscuring of the Truth. Professor Stanislavs Ladusāns in 1991 analysed obstacles for the Truth recognition in Latvian society after the totalitarian age: among them spreading of Marxist pragmatic gnoseology can be mentioned. Another feature of the Latvian life is eclecticism, when absolutely different, even contradictory ideas and fragmentary pieces of different world-outlook systems are put together uncritically without logical examination of their

cohesion. But even more superficially and naïve is syncretism, accepting ideas from others and avoiding the question about the Truth. Besides, in Latvian life and culture we could find, professor Ladusans writes, other features disturbing the Truth cognition, like consumerism, exaggerated rationalism, moral decline, confusion of ideals among the youth and other things having negative impact to the development of the mind, will and character, obscuring the Truth horizon (Ladusāns, 1994, 28). Looking at Truth as an anthropological remedy from ‘Soviet spirituality’, it begs to repeat: “Have we not lived in Darkness?” But if it was so, should it be so now?

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## **“TO BELIEVE OR NOT TO BELIEVE...” RELIGIOUS POLICY, SPIRITUAL LIFE, FAMILY, AND YOUTH IN SOVIET LATVIA**

*The article deals with life and spirituality in Soviet Latvia. Youth and children, also families – in general – formed a fragile bond between their religious environment and family and the secular, hostile world in Soviet Latvia. Soviet schools were the place where these children of faith were least protected from the atheist propaganda and could possibly be identified, but children and youth of non-religious or atheist families learned the Soviet perspective about religion. Youth and families faced with this situation had their own responses and reactions to the reality of the double Soviet life.*

*Keywords: Soviet Latvia, religion, spirituality, youth and families*

### **Historical context**

The history of the Church during the Soviet occupation and especially, the paradigm of social and oral history, which would look at the lifestyle of believers, preservation of traditions, underground prayer groups and congregations in the context of totalitarian ideology is an under-researched topic. Some fragmented studies have been carried out concerning the relationship between the state and the Church, the history of certain religious denominations have been analysed, the life stories of the persecuted and murdered clergy have been studied, yet the study of the everyday Soviet history and the life stories and testimonies of believers

remains a subject for future research. On the one hand, this situation can be explained by a certain aspect of politicization by historians and Latvian historical science, when, after the collapse of the Soviet system and consequently the collapse of the understanding and paradigm of totalitarian history, the primary subjects of historical research became the history of politics and institutions, deportations, World War II, the Holocaust and the consequences of Soviet and Nazi occupation. But, on the other hand, given the recent individual traumatic experiences and the concealment of religious experiences during the Soviet occupation, the Church itself or the religious communities were not interested in bringing this topic to the fore. Moreover, quite often, in the post-Soviet religious space, such research has focused on and is rather characterized by one 'methodologically' dominant approach - the history of the Church primarily being viewed as 'the history of the clergy'. However, this 'clergy-centred' understanding and approach has likewise not contributed to the study of the daily life and family history of the Church during the Soviet occupation. The daily life of religious communities and individuals, the preservation and transfer of traditions and practices, the phenomenon of religious experience and testimony during the Soviet occupation still remain a subject of future research in Latvian historical science.

Miklos Tomka, a Hungarian sociologist of religion, in his study *Church, State and Society in Eastern Europe* analysing religious change in the post-World War II communist region of Eastern Europe, emphasized that people and societies became subjects of a large-scale social experiment that lasted for more than forty years. Arbitrariness prevailed, people and societies were tested on the technique and endurance of this social experiment. The ultimate goal of these experiments was declared to be the creation of a better and more humane society, which required a series of reforms in society, transforming human relations and cultural expressions. On a daily basis, individuals and society as a whole had to face very complex realities: the dominance of Soviet power, the tendency of the ruling elite to destroy the existing social structure and traditional culture, the

manipulative methods of the state and the party, oppression and lack of freedom (Tomka, 2005, 7).

Latvia, similar to Lithuania and Estonia, was occupied for the second time after World War II and became a part of the USSR for half a century. Despite the fact that these three Baltic States were a part of the USSR, the post-war social, cultural and economic processes to a large extent were much closer and more similar to those that took place in Soviet satellite countries, such as Czechoslovakia and Hungary, than in the Soviet Republics. The policy pursued by the Soviet system (including the religious policy) in the occupied Baltic States was much more tolerant than in the other republics. Undoubtedly, the totalitarian system was a brutal destroyer of all the previous cultural heritage, traditions and freedom. The religious persecution carried out in Soviet Latvia, the restrictions faced by all religious communities, and physical terror were an unprecedented fact in the historical memory of society or, as it is called in the history of the Church – an age of martyrs and martyrdom. However, the Baltic society and the Church never experienced the persecution, terror and waves of the 1920s and 1930s encountered by the so called 'old' Soviet Republics. Persecution, terror and the degradation of the cultural environment in the Baltics began 20 years later, after World War II, thereby to a larger extent the religious and cultural traditions, mentality, sense of freedom, a more efficient economic environment and the continuity of generations were preserved. As the Russian historian M. Odincov mentioned in his study, believers and religious hierarchies in Latvia, similar to those in Lithuania and Estonia, were much more confident in their rights, felt more free, and the local authorities were much more tolerant than in other USSR territories (Odincov 2010, 53).

The ideology of Communism undoubtedly weakened the Church, its institutional and official religious forms, but at the same time created a strong phenomenon of informal and hidden religious life, which although could not boast of convincing quantitative indicators, had a certain religious life quality (Tomka, 2005, 16). One of the central hubs of informal religious life in the USSR was the family.

The forced attempt by communists to 'transform' society divided the social life of individuals into two parts:

- 1) an official, visible, public and legal environment controlled by the State;
- 2) the informal, hidden, private, illegal private environment of individuals, which often had its own small-scale networks (Tomka, 2005, 16).

The Soviet totalitarian regime was well aware of the potential ideological dangers of the hidden private environment and family. Already in the 1920s, the USSR had begun to implement a new project of ideological and modernization of society. It was based on the review of traditional values, including family values as one of the foundations of traditional values. The idea of the central role of interests of the collective rather than the family in the life of a Soviet person gained widespread popularity in Soviet society. Family life was juxtaposed to social life and young people were told that family ties were old-fashioned and not necessary for the new system (Orlov, 2010, 140).

These ideas of the modernization of Soviet society came to Latvia very late in the 1960s and 1970s in a not so aggressive and ideological form mainly concerning the transformation of the roles of institutions, laws and gender, but gradually leaving an impact on people's communication, life and everyday traditions. Latvian historian Ineta Lipša and historian Andrejs Plakans of Latvian origin conclude that the form of unregistered relations became a permanent reality in the life of Latvian families during the Soviet era (Plakans & Lipša 2014).

Relatively little research has been carried out on the history of Soviet families in Latvia, especially on the theoretical context and methodological framework of this issue. One of these rare studies dates back to the 1980s and 1990s. It was published in 2010 and was carried out by the Swedish historian of Latvian origin Maija Runcis. In her research, analysing the family policy implemented by Soviet authorities in the occupied Latvia, she emphasizes: "The Soviet system posed challenges to

'traditional' gender norms. The official policy statement focused on the idea of freeing women from patriarchal oppression, but in practice it was reduced to regulating the legal status of mothers and forcing the inclusion of women into the labour market. Mothers, especially working mothers, were idealized and glorified, but at the same time propaganda continued to glorify the masculinity of men. The proletarian man was 'muscular', 'productive', 'militant', and 'heroic'. The Communist Party struggled to find a way to integrate women into the proletarian vision of equality between women and men, and this was done through work, leaving an impact on family life" (Runcis 2012, 123).

Analysing Soviet legislation and propaganda, the author concludes that such an approach underestimated the role of the father in the family, because the propaganda differentiated a woman from a man by building the identity of a woman as a mother and working heroine and at the same time making fathers invisible. In reality it just doubled the women's workload – uncompensated work both outside and in the family as well as the added responsibility of bringing up the children on their shoulders (Runcis 2012, 123).

In Soviet-occupied Latvia, the life of the Church as an institution was marginalized, and its service limited. Officially, religious freedom was declared by the Soviet constitution, but the everyday life and reality were different. Immediately after the war, the Church was forbidden to openly catechize to groups, the clergy, the most active and visible lay leaders were tracked down and forced to cooperate with Soviet institutions and security structures. In the second half of the 1950s, physical terror was replaced by more sophisticated methods of emotional and psychological terror, creating the phenomenon of double Soviet social life, promoting secularization and the privatization of religious life and traditional practices. A number of social campaigns were launched, creating new secular traditions (Runcis, 2012, 296) such as secular wedding and funeral ceremonies, children's and childhood festivals, etc., which also influenced and confronted the lives of religious families.

Sonja Luerhmann in her research on the Soviet religious policy states:

“During the Brezhnev era, a first peak of attention to antireligious work occurred in 1965, when there was a concerted effort to organize and promote new Soviet holidays and lifecycle rituals that had been invented in the 1920s and 1950s. This happened amidst rising concerns about dissenting groups that had split off from larger Christian churches. A second peak occurred in 1972/73, when the focus was on reorganizing the state propaganda efforts to make them more politically and economically efficient. It would thus be inaccurate to say that the state gave up on atheist work under Brezhnev, although the rising complaints about the “religious indifference” of young people indicate that it became difficult to convince the population that religion continued to be harmful and dangerous under established socialism” (Luerhmann, 2013, 551).

### Families, spirituality and religious life in the Soviet Latvia

For centuries, all religious communities have implemented many efforts and created their own and approved youth and young adult ministries, developed catechisms, programmes of spiritual formation and education, linking these approaches to the global vision of each denomination. Faith was lived out through liturgy, formation and service. The Church offered young people a vision of life based on a faith that calls each of them to holiness, community, and service. The Church for centuries used to be a place where young adults and youth had turned for support during critical times of personal/social insecurity and searching for one’s own religious identity and meaning of human life. Youth also is a time for making fundamental decisions.

At the meeting, late 1963, of the Ideological Commission of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, religious ideology was reported as affecting an important aspect of the intellectual life of an insignificant segment of the Soviet people. This influential body decided that it was necessary to create an appropriate system of education in scientific atheism which would embrace all age groups of the population and which

would prevent the propagation of religious ideas, especially among children and adolescents. This commission also passed several resolutions and created machinery in order to make certain that the Soviet citizens would not be exposed to religious ideas, but rather to those of atheism. According to "*Uchitel'skaya Gazeta*, religious views still exist and even in some cases prove capable of coming back to life and influencing new sections of population, including children and teenagers" (Brickman, 1974). Childhood stories contain very unique and valuable evidence of the preservation of faith and tradition. The narrative of childhood experiences of the Soviet period has up until now been a completely excluded subject of research on the history of the Church during the Soviet occupation.

The Soviet occupation power divided people's existence and daily life into two zones, destroying the psychological integrity: the public (regime-neutral or loyal) and the private (hidden and illegal). These areas were often separated by a large gap. Lies, double life, pretence and neutrality were the intensities of feelings that most accurately describe the life of every typical Soviet citizen. Soviet propaganda often claimed that there were almost no 'dark believers' left in the USSR, but in reality, of course, churches and monasteries operated in a limited manner, elements of the church life were visible, and sacramental practices were possible. The number of people practicing faithful and spiritual life were far beyond the Soviet statistics and countless times higher than the Soviet authorities wanted to acknowledge. In his diary on church visits to Latvia in the 1960s and 1980s, Cardinal Julijans Vaivods, contrary to the official Soviet statistics, constantly recorded a large number of confirmations or communions during the Church service: "I was amazed that on the eve of the working day, the big church was full of worshippers. I confirmed 356 children. On Sunday right from early morning people from far corners flocked to the church [...] at least 5–6 thousand people had come. I confirmed 668 children and young people on Sunday. So altogether [...] 1024 people" (Diary of Bishop Julijans Vaivods, 2010, 139). This scrupulous record was made on June 19, 1967, during a visit to a small rural congregation in Latgale.



Respondent 1 shared his family's story of the events in Aglona in 1960. The local Soviet government planned to turn not just the auxiliary buildings, but also the church of Aglona itself into mechanized workshops in 1960: "At night, the locals hurriedly collected a very large sum of money, if I am not mistaken around 200,000 Soviet roubles during that time, to buy back their church from Soviet authorities the next morning. The whole process was organized by my grandfather. The money was taken by the local authorities and the church was allowed to remain" (R1). In an interview respondent 1 emphasized that during the Soviet times, Catholics knew that "the Church could be saved" (R1). Taking the idea and juxtaposing this with the testimonies of other interviewees, it could be definitely concluded that Catholics not only knew that "the Church should be saved", but also learned how to do so. During the Soviet era, the Church was not only a place for believers to meet God, but also "a refuge, an oasis and place of freedom where a free spirit could develop, a legalized refuge where both former prisoners and the intelligentsia could hide behind walls" (R1).

No matter how hard the Soviet propaganda tried or the authorities attempted to restrict or intimidate Catholics in Latvia during the Soviet occupation, nothing really worked, especially in Latvian Catholic region – Latgale. People, based on their own conscience and sense of freedom, created their own inner model of spiritual life and practice. It was a deeply personal relationship with God, not so much with congregations or the Church as an institution and the clergy as spiritual leaders at its core, as the Church was restricted in its activity and the clergy – controlled, but with the family at the core of religious practice and preservation of traditions. During the Soviet occupation, Catholic families learned how to "learn to stand above the system" under the conditions of prohibition and control (R1). It was much more difficult to control the life of a religious family and what was happening in it, especially if the family members themselves simply learned to adapt to the situation, to trust and to speak things freely only within the family. Respondent 2 also emphasizes this in her memories: "When I was a child, my parents warned me that what was

related to God should remain in the family, within the house. I had to be careful in the Church as well, but I wasn't particularly scared as I did not understand the consequences that could threaten us" (R2). As shown by the interview, during the Soviet occupation, Catholics, in response to control and oppression in religious practice and secular life gradually developed a system of taboos that helped the community and Catholics themselves not only to survive but also to pass on Catholic traditions to future generations, mainly within the family. The 'taboo approach' or proven internal prohibitions and self-control (not venturing to talk about spiritual life and practice, experience and prayer under certain circumstances, avoiding public Church attendance and other Church and religion related matters) helped to easily navigate and survive in Soviet conditions, physically and emotionally preserve oneself and maintain one's faith. "I came to the church at the last moment and after the Mass I went out through the back door ..." (R3) – was a classical story of believers who felt the control and surveillance, but continued to attend the church, and made certain adjustments to their habits and manners.

What Catholics could not or dared not do in public could be accomplished within the family without abandoning or neglecting any important Catholic tradition that was characteristic of the pre-war practice of the Latvian Catholic: "At home we celebrated Christmas, Easter, only it all happened behind thick curtains, we prayed to God for sure, sang songs. We also had traditions in the family – prayers for the dead or singing psalms. Women gathered within our family, and we prayed and sang together, including prayers with rosary and many other prayers" (R2).

In his narrative, Respondent 1 highlighted one important feature of Catholic religious life during the Soviet occupation – the differences in the behaviour of generations, which were best seen within the family circle. The pre-war older generations, who had not grown up in Soviet conditions, were much more confident in terms of their behaviour and communication with Soviet authorities. The younger generation, born shortly before or after the war, were either more scared or more flexible, trained to survive and adapt more easily: "Older people were not afraid,

middle-aged people were a little bit scared ...” (R2). Often in such situations a division of roles of Catholic generations took place, when the older generation took more care of preserving traditions and passing them on to the youngest offspring in the family: “...My grandmother took care of it, she was the biggest instigator and prompter. When my grandmother died, our grandfather moved in with us, who then took over conducting prayers and maintaining religious traditions in our family” (R2).

Researching the stories and experiences of Catholic children is not an easy task, but it is an important aspect, because children were the least protected on the one hand, and those who formed a fragile bond between their religious environment and family and the secular, hostile world on the other hand. Soviet schools were the place where these children of faith were least protected from atheist propaganda and could possibly be identified. Some children, faced with this situation, had their own responses and reactions to the reality of this double Soviet life. A part of the children who quickly understood the situation in the school environment and reacted confidently to the realities of the Soviet double life, overcoming all difficulties and realizing all the possible consequences, did not lose their faith, but on the contrary only strengthened it. Often, especially in Latgale, the youth and children, not without the support of their parents, united in ‘underground Catholic groups’: “In my school, in my class, I knew which classmates I could talk to about who will go to church on Sunday, or talk about the big church festivals. There were girls in my class who went to processions with me, we went there to adore, we really liked it, but it was our big secret” (R2). Children in their semi-legal groups used to meet not so much in the parish house or church because it was dangerous, but in private homes, thus creating a kind of family ‘home church’, which was a safe haven for prayer and faith building. Rosary prayers in May and October were the most common spiritual practices of this type of ‘home church’, as well as singing psalms in memory of the dead, and other traditional catholic prayers. Catholic children, in a secular environment inside the school and outside as well, learned to understand each other well, to trust each other and to build their own illegal Catholic

network, keeping many Catholic traditions alive in their daily lives: "There was a bunch of classmates who would assemble in a dark hallway, in the corner, discussing what they saw or heard. The girls talked about the day and time they would go to church to adore and take part in the procession" (R2).

The younger children were usually not as cautious as the older children, especially when they met or saw their teachers at church services, as evidenced by the stories of the interviewees:

"As I grew older, I became more cautious and upon seeing a teacher in the church – I would steer clear of ... But then I already knew which teachers go to church, with whom I could feel safe with and where it was better to take a neutral position, when it was said during the lesson that there was no God" (R2).

Catholic children growing up in the Soviet system were constantly confronted with the reality of parallel life and all its manifestations, creating a rather traumatic experience for children. Many Catholic children and young people, unable to understand what was happening instead of becoming active Catholics, on the contrary, without understanding what was happening, 'froze' in their faith and separated themselves from the Church.:

"When I went to school, I wanted to put on a chain with a picture of Jesus in the shape of a heart presented to me by my godmother on the day of confirmation, which I really liked, but my mother said that I should not do that, because we should not talk about God and not wear such things at school. At that moment, something broke inside me" (R4).

Childhood experiences were not without consequences, as many young people facing Soviet realities and double living standards were unable to adapt and abandoned their faith or became formalists in their religious practices.

Faced with lies and pretence, Catholic children were forced to quickly learn the true aspects of Soviet life, where often everyone realized that they were pretending and lying, but were still forced to do so in order to

survive as individuals: “[..] I even remember that I consciously lied, which made me feel very bad [..]” (R2). All interviewees have memories of stories about experiences of themselves as individuals, their family members and the wider community in the laboratory of lies created by the Soviet system and its experiments. In these memories, one can most often feel the dislike against this practice of double life, a deep existential reflection on human nature and history. As Respondent 1 recalled, the double morality and the situation in the collective farm, especially with regard to theft, confused the faithful Catholics and “led to deep questions about moral issues in the Soviet system” (R1).

Constant contact with Soviet lies not only affected the children, but also hardened and caused them to grow rapidly emotionally and intellectually. As can be seen from this story fragment: “But even this manifestation of atheism was so unconvincing that we had something to laugh about in the hallway after lessons. At the time, the teacher herself felt uncomfortable, but she had to do it as a duty [..]” (R2).

Religious youth in various public and private spaces communicated with their peers of non-religious or atheist background. Celebrating religious events or singing religious songs were something that was not fully understandable to the secular ones. Sometimes certain religious traditions in secular families were partly adapted. As Respondent 5 whose family was of the Soviet functionalist background remembered: “[..] we had no Christian traditions. We didn’t celebrate Christmas, my brother and I didn’t even know what it was, we only celebrated the New Year, we painted eggs at Easter without any theoretical basis [..]” (R5).

Interaction between religious and non-religious world of the Soviet Latvian youth also was partly hidden that at first glance would not be fully understandable to the newcomers:

“On Christmas Eve, I went to house of my friend Ieva. There was always a Christmas tree and after eating together, all children went to another room to play and eat cakes, but the adults sang in German ‘Oh Christmas tree’ and other songs. [..] Nevertheless, the fact that it is Christmas, the children did not know and did not

understand. We did not understand what adults were doing and why they were singing in German. The children were not told because it was not safe" (R5).

Respondent 6 (a son of the Baptist family in Latvia), observing interaction between religious and non-religious people in Soviet Latvia, stated that there was only one way how to convince the non-religious or atheist people of different age around: "[..] to prove that we are not dark, uneducated and lazy people there was only one and single way [..] to show the opposite [..]" (R6).

## Conclusion

The Soviet system, proclaimed by propaganda in the public sphere as the only correct and just political system, was in fact a game of pretence and hypocrisy for survival. Believers in Latvia survived it overwhelmingly and preserved their religious practices and traditions, passing them on to future generations.

In Soviet Latvia, the Church was not only a place to meet God, but also a place of intellectual and emotional refuge. People, based on their own conscience and sense of freedom, created their own inner model of spiritual life, not so much with congregations or the Church as an institution and the clergy as spiritual leaders at its core, as the Church was restricted in its activity and the clergy – controlled, but with the family at the core of religious practice and preservation of traditions. Families became home churches that passed on religious practices and traditions.

Youth stories contain unique and valuable evidence of the preservation of faith and tradition. Schools and the Soviet upbringing had less positive/negative influence on the spirituality/religiosity of the Soviet youth and children in Latvia than family traditions. Continuity of faith tradition within the family had a stronger influence on youth and children. If the family was atheist or secular, children's and youth's attitude towards God and Church was neutral or negative. The double life standards had the most damaging effect not only on religious youth, but also on non-religious ones.

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Solveiga Krūmiņa-Konņkova

## **BETWEEN THE ALLOWED AND FORBIDDEN – EASTERN SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS IN LATVIA (1960–1980)**

*The article examines the existence, emergence and adaptation of Eastern spiritual ideas in Soviet Latvia in the 1960s–1980s. The adepts of several Eastern spiritual movements, such as the Yoga movement, continued their practices underground, thus maintaining the bond with the tradition of the 1920s–1930s. In the 1970s–1980s, some new movements, such as the Sathya Sai Baba Society, emerged in the cultural space of Soviet Latvia.*

*In response to the growing interest in Eastern spiritual teachings, the Soviet regime imposed strict limitations regulating to what extent such interest was permissible and did not harm Soviet ideology and life. For example, Hatha yoga was allowed only as a part of physical culture. At the same time, there was an active spiritual quest in the private space of Soviet citizens, manoeuvring within the permitted limits or figuring out ways to 'legally' circumvent them.*

*Keywords: Eastern spiritual movements, Soviet spirituality, Yoga, Sathya Sai Baba Society, Buddhism*

### **Introduction**

Despite the policy of the Soviet regime to restrict the activities of religious organisations, Latvia was an essential religious and spiritual centre after World War II. Along with Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Old Believers, Lutherans, Baptists and several other Christian denominations, there were various Eastern spiritual movements in Latvia, especially in the



late Soviet period. The adepts of the Yoga movement, Buddhism and Roerich Society, active in Latvia in the 1920s–1930s, continued their practices underground, maintaining the bond with the pre-war tradition. In the 1970s–1980s, some new movements became known in the cultural space of Soviet Latvia. Thus, several representatives of the so-called creative intelligentsia spontaneously and in different ways followed the ideas disseminated, for example, by Sathya Sai Baba or International Krishna Consciousness societies. Many others did not associate themselves with any movement but just as passionately perceived new ideas and formed their unique worldview. In it, faith in the mahatmas described by Helena Blavatsky was complemented by faith in angels and man's ability to approach the mysteries of Space. Researchers later named this spirituality the New Age movement. True, during the period under consideration, the interest in such spirituality was spontaneous, and at least in Latvia, it is hard to find definite signs of a sustained movement.

Unlike Christian churches, it might seem that Soviet authorities considered the fascination with Eastern ideas to be less harmful. However, this interest in the East was also strictly limited, and it was not advisable to exceed the boundaries set by the regime.

The USSR foreign policy in relations with India in the 1960s–1980s permitted extensive cultural ties between both countries. The strengthening of cultural ties between the USSR and India was facilitated by the visit of astronaut Yuri Gagarin to India in November 1961. The interpreter of the delegation, Andrei Vavilov, remembered years later that

“For ordinary Indians, Gagarin seemed like a deity: after all, he observed our planet from an unprecedented height, from black space. Hindus are pious people; hundreds of gods inhabit their spiritual world... So they perceived Gagarin in the line of celestials, almost a creature from the Moon; he was a fairy tale in reality for them” (Rzhannikov 2019).

An in-depth focus on Indian culture began after an impressive exhibition dedicated to India in 1963 in Moscow. Exhibitions on Indian

literature had already taken place in the USSR; however, this exhibition was much more ambitious. News about this exhibition also reached Latvia. Thus, in one of the largest newspapers, *Padomju Jaunatne* (Soviet Youth), the report from this exhibition was published. The translator and poet Uldis Bērziņš mentioned that, for example, “Indian literature is represented by a small stand of materials in Hindi, Urdu, English, Oriya, Bengali and other languages. Tagore, Prem Chand, young storytellers, *Discovery of India* by Jawaharlal Nehru, literature on Buddhism, Hindu textbook in English, *History of Indian Art*, *History of India for Children...* Lots of illustrated magazines” (Bērziņš 1963, 3). The interest in Indian literature among the Latvian intellectuals, especially the writers, gradually contributed to the study of Indian spiritual heritage, too.

### Impact of Indian spiritual movements

A unique role in establishing contacts directly with India was played by the Friends of India section of the Latvian Society for Foreign Friendship and Cultural Relations in Latvia, led by the People’s Poet Mirdza Ķempe. Her significance in strengthening cultural ties between India and Latvia is evidenced by the fact that in 1972 she received an honorary doctorate in literature from the Visva Bharati University, founded by Rabindranath Tagore.

Ķempe’s interest in India was manifested by her participation in hosting Indian delegations in Latvia, her poems about India, such as the poem *Ashes of Jawaharlal Nehru* into many languages and personal acquaintance with Indira Gandhi, which continued in years of correspondence. “She was, indeed, a central figure in dealing with issues concerning India. Everyone could count on warm encouragement and support from the poetess” (Ivbulis 1988, 164).

Ķempe tried to be loyal to the Soviet regime and respect its ideological dogmas, but like for many at the time, there was a hidden side of her life. This part of her life included several elements that imitated Indian spiritual practices. For example, there was an altar with a portrait of

Vivekananda in the centre. As K empe's contemporaries stated many years later, "There were books about India in various languages, from descriptions of the lives of Indian saints, Indian philosophy and Indian history to Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, also yoga. The brightest roses and carnations always bloomed in this corner. Candles were lit during the celebrations, and the poet burned incense sticks on the table" (More, 1977, 125). We can assume that K empe also had other self-created rituals.

K empe received various sources of literature published in India that were sent to her through the Embassy of India in Moscow, including spiritual texts. Working as a consultant in the Writers' Union, she familiarised young writers who gathered around her with the 'presents from India'. Thus, from the end of the 1960s, the brochures of the Sathya Sai Baba movement began circulating among the younger generation of poets or the so-called "K empe's children" and their friends. Thus, architect Maija Grotuse set up a group to study Satya Sai Baba's works that had to work in secret under the Soviet regime. The group included writer Alise Eka, author of unusual philosophical fairy tales, and poet Mirdza Bendrupe. Her intensive spiritual search resulted in Latvian translation of Bhagavad-gita, whose fragments were published in 1994, already after her death (Bendrupe 1994). Bendrupe's passion for Indian philosophical teachings is evident in her fairy tale book *The Most Beautiful Garden* and her meditative poetry, highly valued by the younger poets. As Grotuse later remembered, in the 1960–1970s, there were not so many Sai Baba's books, and they were reproduced by a typewriter and circulated among trusted people. In the early 1980s, the restrictions in terms of receiving literature from abroad eased. For example, in 1983 and 1984, Satja Sai Baba's books were brought from Germany by esoteric Rasma Roz ite. As a result, other groups emerged.

What attracted these people to Sai Baba's ideas? One answer to this question can be found in an interview with a former member of this movement: "I realised that Latvian culture is much deeper than its external manifestations. Therefore, Sai Baba's advice that everyone should develop their own culture is essential. I realised that Sai Baba also helps me understand the Latvians' roots more deeply, to overcome the sometimes

popularised outward national naivety. [-]. Sai Baba teaches us to see more clearly, awakens us” (Cited from Krūmiņa-Koņkova, Gills 2005, 195).

The reflection on the closeness between Indian and Latvian culture and the related encouragement to focus on in-depth studies of both cultures was characteristic of several young poets brought up by Ķempe. Imants Ziedonis, one of the most popular Latvian poets at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, was also among them. His *Poem on Milk* was recited at state events, school concerts, radio, and television. There were questions about this poem in the secondary school final exams. It can be said that this work was recognised as representing the ‘Soviet spirituality’. Nevertheless, only a few knew that Ziedonis was deeply influenced by Upanishads and other spiritual texts by Indian gurus. According to unverified information, Imants Ziedonis has also been associated with a group of Sai Baba’s followers for some time. In the poem, he also referred to Vedic myths. As the Indologist Viktors Ivbulis has argued, the poem contains references to one of the aspects of ancient Indian god Shiva’s wife Devi, namely, to Jagan-mātā (mother of the world) or Sakti – power, feminine cosmic energy (Ivbulis 1988, 166). References to Indian spiritual texts are so hidden in the poem that they form a maze of different connotations for readers to decode.

The group of Sai Baba’s students in Latvia, which in the 1960s–1980s functioned as an underground group, became an environment for a complex polyphonic dialogue of various esoteric and religious traditions. In the atmosphere of those years, the spiritual pursuits of people who belonged to this group included more than just an interest in the Vedic tradition. The interest in Eastern spirituality was also fuelled by other ideas, which gained unprecedented popularity in the West during the hippie movement and its subculture.

Fragmentary and mostly inaccurate knowledge of the ideas of Indian spiritual teachers in their quest coexisted peacefully with the ideas of theosophical and anthroposophical teachings, borrowings of texts of Christian mystics or forbidden modern Western philosophers. Nor did they seek precision in presenting those ideas, seeing in them mainly a

source of inspiration for their creative activity. Their approach to practicing one ritual or another was equally creative and free.

All these ideas discussed in small groups became sources of inspiration not only for poets. Thus, the influence of these discussions also appeared in the works of painters Leonīds Mauriņš and Rita Valnere, sculptors Arta Dumpe and Igor Vasiljev, graphic artist Inga Kambala and some others.

The fact that interest in India was politically permissible gave these seekers more room for manoeuvre and the conviction that, in essence, they were not doing anything illegal. As their quests were more personality-oriented and not openly against the Soviet regime and its regulations, the research problem is whether this underground can be evaluated according to the same criteria as evaluating the political underground. No documents have been found confirming that the security authorities have persecuted these groups, although these authorities were probably well informed of their existence. Unfortunately, the opportunity to interview the first members of the Sai Baba group and to obtain more detailed information or confirmation for one or another research version has been missed.

In response to the growing interest in Eastern spiritual teachings, the Soviet regime imposed strict limitations regulating in which teachings such interest was permissible and did not harm Soviet ideology and life. For example, Hatha yoga was allowed only as a part of physical culture.

The history of the yoga movement began in interwar Latvia when Riga was one of the most visible European yoga centres. Some activists of the Latvian Yoga Society, well-known in the 1920s–1930s, continued to practice yoga after World War II, thus maintaining a connection with the pre-Soviet tradition. One such activist was the already mentioned poet Mirdza Bendrupe. There is fragmentary and not yet verified information about home groups organised by the Society's old members. Those groups also operated according to the underground principles. In this way, practical yoga classes and discussions were held, and literature published in the pre-Soviet years was distributed. The distribution form was strengthened already in the 1930s when each member was encouraged to reproduce the

texts of yoga teachers in at least five copies. The reason for this was the great interest in these texts. Such practice continued during the Soviet years.

In the 1960s, interest in yoga also had a place in the public discourse. In essence, the publications in major newspapers then also determined the extent to which this interest in yoga was formally permitted. It can be said that the spiritual aspects of yoga at that time were taboo subjects. Most publications in the 1960s–1970s mention yoga either in various travel notes about India, which describe yoga demonstrations, or by emphasising the importance of yoga in medicine and increasing the physical capacity of the human body. This approach was precisely described by a quote from an article entitled *Yoga and the Man of the Future*: “There are no limits to the training possibilities of the human body. The mysterious sources of the body’s physical forces are discovered and used in a variety of ways” (Volkovs 1968, 4).

Significantly, one of the first who spoke publicly about yoga was Imants Ziedonis. He mentioned yoga in his travel notes about Altay, published in 1964. Ziedonis was fascinated with yoga while studying in Moscow, at the Higher Literature programme from 1962 to 1963 (Lejiņš 1966, 4). Although Ziedonis also saw in yoga, first of all, a way to develop a person’s physical abilities and practised yoga breathing technics mainly because of his ailing lungs, he was also among the few who tried to show the connection of yoga with cosmic processes. As he wrote, “for the first time, I feel that breathing is the most beautiful process of life, not just physiological” (Ziedonis 1964, 87).

The popularity of yoga grew even faster after the documentary *Indian yogis: Who are they?* was shown in Latvia in 1971 with great success. The newspapers mentioned that this “movie reveals the veil of mystery and supernaturalism that has covered the art of yoga for many centuries. It will tell Soviet cinema viewers what is truly valuable and useful in the yoga system” (Anonymous 1971, 4).

Yoga became a trendy word and hobby for hundreds of Soviet people in a relatively short time. Reading the Latvian fiction of the 1970s, very often there is a character practicing yoga. Here is how such a personality

was described in one of the famous novels of the time: “Zelma was able to talk about the latest pop music and the use of lasers in medicine, Native American culinary and energy perspectives. She is not entangled in art history, was familiar with international film scandals, followed publications on UFOs, had read books on yoga, astrology, hypnosis, palmistry, etc.” (Skujiņš 1981, 38). We can also read more serious references to yoga in interviews with actors or other well-known public figures in the 1970s-1980s, especially at the end of 1980 (see, for example, Danosa 1975, Antonoviča 1982, Krūmiņš 1989).

In the 1970s, illustrated magazines featured specialised yoga exercises, such as yoga exercises for women or exercises for a good mood (*Zvaigzne* 1978, 37). Librarians testified that, for example, the magazine *India* was like a sieve. “Readers cut out everything to do with yoga exercises” (Brālītis 1970, 3). In 1981, the book *Yoga for Mothers and Children*, translated from German, was published, which quickly became a guide for everyone interested in learning Hatha yoga asanas. With the publication of this book, public interest in yoga grew even more. According to an editorial column of the magazine *Zvaigzne* in 1988, officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the LSSR had predicted that “the ninth wave of magazine’s circulation growth is expected if mass media publish materials on yoga and acupuncture” (Priedīte 1988, 1).

However, as specified above, yoga mostly meant physical exercises and breathing practices in all cases. The spiritual aspects of yoga were mentioned very rarely. Such a position was officially maintained until the end of the 1980s. At the same time, there was an active spiritual quest in the private space of Soviet citizens, manoeuvring within the permitted limits or figuring out ways to “legally” circumvent them. In the early 1970s, it was discovered how, within limits allowed by the regime, one could also openly focus on spiritual yoga practices. A turning point was marked around 1970 when psychotherapy became common in Latvia, and autogenic training was applied as one of its methods.

The users of this method did not hide the connection of autogenic training with yoga meditation practices. Aleksandrs Falkenšteins, a

psychotherapist at the Republican Psychoneurological Dispensary, was one of the first practitioners of this method. In one of his interviews, he confirmed: “Discarding the mystic that is in the teachings of yoga, however, we cannot fail to acknowledge the persistence of one method. One of the most effective yoga methods has now been called ‘autogenic training’” (Kocēns 1970, 4).

Falkenšteins and several other psychotherapists were actively involved in promoting the newly discovered method. As with Hatha yoga exercises, magazines published instructions and techniques for daily autogenic training (see, for example, Anonymous 1979). Mass sessions of autogenic training or mental gymnastics were organised in many places in Latvia. Mental gymnastics could also be studied in several groups. Thus, a Good Mood Club was established and actively operated at the Culture House of the Republican Trade Union Council of Latvia. Under Falkenšteins’ leadership, secondary school and university students participated in the *School of Good Name*. As the former listener of this school remembers, young people got their first ideas about meditation and started practising it during classes of this school (Krūmiņa-Koņkova 2021a). The interest in Eastern philosophy also arose in these classes.

Moreover, this interest in Eastern philosophy may have complemented a seemingly fundamentally different worldview. The unifying element was the person’s progress towards self-improvement and, first of all, the formation of the perfect body. Thus, in an interview published in the late Soviet-era youth magazine *Liesma*, a 17-year-old vocational school student said: “I started attending autogenous training, hypnosis, yoga. I will take care of my body.” From the interview, one can learn that the young man believes in God, but in his own particular way, is highly interested in Eastern philosophies, and plans to study in a Lutheran spiritual seminary (Zaiceva 1989).

Of course, the understanding of meditation was vague, but it was the first step in a more extensive quest. The next step was searching for the appropriate literature, using all the channels available at the time. Most of the knowledge was fragmentary and superficial, but such knowledge also



made many enthusiasts want to meditate actively. Undoubtedly, in the form, how they understood these practices. An entry in the diary by Kaspars Tobis, a well-known musician today, shows how peculiar such self-created meditations could have been:

“While listening to the calm composition of Klaus Schulze, something interesting happened somewhere in the middle. As before, I had relaxed. I did not think about anything. The sounds rustled in my ears, and in the imagination, something was formed. Still indeterminate, because this piece differed from Michel Jarre’s symphony<sup>1</sup> with intense, sometimes even sharp sounds, it was calmer. Then suddenly, somewhere, I was almost overwhelmed by brief drowsiness or something like it, and, before my eyes, a picture that I had not thought about or seen at all appeared. It was a bend of spruce forest from above, and black footprints in white snow meandered along the forest edge. It looked something like this: The spruce forest was black and solid, the footprints winded away, and the first spruce, the contours of which could be distinguished, was a bit sloping, as if it could be seen from above. These were human footprints” (Tobis 1987).

Therefore, when the first yoga meditation teachers from the West came to Latvia at the end of the 1980s, they were met by many enthusiasts who had learned meditation in an autodidactic manner.

### Adaptation of Buddhist ideas

Buddhism is another spiritual movement whose tradition in Latvia began during the interwar period, although it did not have many followers. However, various books published in the interwar period also circulated among the interested persons during the Soviet era. The books written by the well-known Latvian-Estonian Buddhist Kārlis Tenisons took a special place among these publications. He had merged the

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier in the diary, it was written that Tobis was meditating while listening to Michel Jarre music album *Rendez-Vous*.

simplified teaching of Buddhism with the ideas of nationalism and the Baltic Union.

In the 1960s, this history of interwar Latvian Buddhism was not publicly mentioned. One of the few exceptions can be found in 1967. Philosopher Ernsts Karpovics, in the article about the book of academician Valentīns Šteinbergs *Philosophical Life in Latvia at the beginning of the 20th Century*, recalled that the decline of ideology in bourgeois Latvia manifested itself in religious mysticism and various idealistic tendencies. In this regard, he mentioned Aleksandrs Janeks, a professor of chemistry, as a Buddhist propagandist (Karpovics 1967, 4). More serious articles on the influence of Buddhism on interwar Latvian culture appeared only in the 1980s. Thus, literary scholar Dace Lūse, analysing the religious quest of the Latvian poet Fricis Bārda, reminded of his passion for Buddhism. She stressed that Bārda was particularly interested in Buddhist teaching on suffering (Lūse 1980, 160).

In the 1960s–1970s, references to Buddhism, which appeared in Latvian press, were mainly connected with the political events in Vietnam and Laos. According to the changing foreign policy of the USSR, the publications emphasised both the imperialist or *vice versa* anti-imperialist position of Buddhists in those countries. Thus, in December 1960, the LSSR Communist Party's newspaper *Cīņa* wrote about the situation in Laos where “the United States managed to gather a small group of obedient officials, merchants, generals, Buddhist preachers and aristocrats. It is a rather uneven group of people, which, however, has one thing in common with the hosts behind the ocean. Like the great monopolists, they live off exploitation; they are parasites on the living flesh of the people” (Svira 1960, 3). A few years later, the opposite attitude towards Buddhism appears in a publication about the dispersal of a student demonstration in the old capital of South Vietnam, Hue. One of the students' demands was to end the persecution of Buddhists (Anonymous 1963, 3). Another type of publication was travel notes, which sometimes appeared in popular newspapers and magazines. They mainly mentioned the cultural heritage

of Buddhism while emphasising that this religion was increasingly losing its influence (Skujiņš 1964; Barkāns 1972).

The first description of Buddhist religious-philosophical ideas and the influence of Buddhism on Japanese culture appeared in 1971 in the literary magazine *Karogs* (Flag): the short review of the article *Reading Kawabata Yasunari* by the Russian translator of Japanese literature Grigorieva, already published in Moscow. This review contained references to the Buddhist teaching of spirituality, the absolute beginning of every being, and the Japanese tea ceremony (Anonymous 1971b, 188). Around the same time, several articles about *The Beatles* crisis appeared in the press, mentioning, among other things, George Harrison's attempt to "draw inspiration from Buddhist philosophy" (Anonymous 1970, 3).

Japan and *The Beatles* are two essential factors that stimulated interest in Buddhism in Latvia in the second half of the 1970s. However, officials stated at that time that "there are practically no such directions as Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism and Islam in Latvia" (Kokars 1978, 2). To some extent, this statement was true, as interest in Buddhism as a spiritual movement did not appear openly. However, Buddhism could be taught in the language of Aesop, which through the innocent stories or activities contained a concealed meaning to informed people or people who wanted to know something more about this spiritual movement.

One such hidden form of teaching was related to the growing popularity of Eastern martial arts in the early 1970s. Articles on karate appeared in the periodicals, mentioning the unique "Oriental Spirit" of this martial art and the role of Buddhist monks in its spread in Japan (Anonymous 1971c). For many, the mention of these facts was a catalyst for seeking additional information and familiarizing with Buddhism in general and Zen Buddhism. Those who started participating in these martial arts training could learn even more about this oriental teaching.

The second case is related to the considerable enthusiasm of Latvian society regarding ikebana, for which one person had to be thanked – Vladimir Kalva. Vladimir Kalva was a professional gardener, traveller, photographer and also an exciting poet. After studying with the masters

of Ikebana's Sogec School in Moscow at the end of the 1960s, he used the Japanese flower-arranging tradition with its Buddhist symbols to delve into the themes essential for the people who visited the exhibitions of his flower arrangements. He has been organising these exhibitions since 1965 (Cīrulis 1965). He has also participated in different international exhibitions, and the World Flower Exhibition in Paris was among them. Around 1970, Kalva began lecturing on creating flower arrangements, and in later years, from the beginning of the 1980s, flower arranging courses were held under his leadership. Many had seen on television the documentary film *Living Watercolors* directed by Vija Bunka, which told not only about the beauty of living flowers but also about the talent and knowledge of Kalva to see this beauty and show it to others. In 1975, Kalva's book *Poetry of Flowers* was published. Describing the history of ikebana, Kalva referred to the Buddhist ritual of sacrificing flowers in front of the image of Buddha. The book also explains the symbolic meanings of flowers and their arrangements (Kalva 1975, 22–26). In this way, Kalva seamlessly introduced the reader and his students to the spiritual world of Buddhism. Until the end of the 1980s, Kalva's articles on ikebana also appeared in periodicals from time to time. Kalva's library shows that he had read all the literature available at the time about Japan and its culture (Krūmiņa-Koņkova 2021c). In addition, participating in international exhibitions and competitions, he, as his friend Oļgerts Smilga remembers, took every opportunity to learn something new about Japanese traditions. For example, he introduced peculiar daily practices, such as the tea-drinking ritual, atypical for Latvians (Krūmiņa-Koņkova 2021b).

Although Kalva's knowledge was not systematic, it gave his worldview a remarkable peculiarity, which is well reflected in his flower arrangements, photos, and poetry. In 1980, the philosopher Andris Rubenis wrote a review of Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*. One of his conclusions was that *Stalker's* faith is a belief in flowers, stones, silence ...” (Rubenis 1980). These words can be undoubtedly applied also to Kalva.

After 1984, the situation began to change rapidly, and interest in Buddhism could already be expressed openly. Articles about Buddhism as

spiritual teaching appeared in the press more often. In 1984, a series of lectures, *Indian Culture and Literature*, was taken with great enthusiasm. One of the most attended lectures was devoted to the symbolism of Buddhism in Tibetan art. In 1985, the newspaper *Ciņa* began publishing travel notes about the Altai mountains in several continuations. Short fragments of this article were devoted to the history of Tibetan Buddhism (Gerts 1986). There was no negativity in these lines. It was an indication that the time of bans was coming to an end.

### Some conclusions

The cases mentioned in this article shows what was familiar to many who had focused on Eastern ideas in their quest for self-improvement.

Their spiritual pursuits were not public. To some extent, their situation can be called being in the spiritual underground. However, it was not a departure or isolation from Soviet reality. It was just a parallel life. According to memoirs and interviews published in the 1980s and 1990s, this life was often not revealed outward and undisturbedly coexisted with Soviet life and norms.

Whether deliberately used in the creative process or unknowingly influenced them, the spiritual search of creative personalities gave their works a remarkable peculiarity that distinguished them from the contribution of average Socialist Realism. They were positively appreciated by society and, at the same time, quite often ranked in the canon of Soviet spirituality, as, for example, the poetry of Ķempe and Ziedonis or flower arrangements of Vladimirs Kalva. When spiritual quests were too visible and reached beyond the private area, Soviet authorities attempted to restrict them, which in the late 1980s already proved impossible.

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Nadežda Pazuhina

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## EVERYDAY RELIGIOSITY AS THE 'ELSEWHERE' OF SOCIALIST REALITY: SPOKEN NARRATIVES OF THE ORTHODOX OLD BELIEVERS IN LATGALE

*The concept of 'everyday religiosity' is one of the significant characteristic features of the Orthodox Old Believers religious tradition. It defined the central place of religious practices, providing not only divine services and activities within a certain parish, but even opportunities of practicing prayer and other forms of religious behaviour within the private scope of family life. During the socialist period, especially the period of anti-religious propaganda and scientific atheism, open demonstration of religious beliefs was strongly restricted and controlled. Nevertheless, a relatively large group of Old Believers maintained their collective religious identity in spite of the gradually disappearing close links between individual believers and parishes.*

*The aim of this study is to investigate the forms of religious behaviour in the Old Believers' everyday experience during the Soviet period and to contextualize perceptions of religious experience in Socialist reality revealed in their spoken narratives. This exploration is based on the collection of in-depth interviews with Old Believers, recorded 2006–2016 in Latgale, and represents spoken narratives of various generations in terms of their everyday life during the Soviet period (1950s–1970s). These sources reflect a retrospective view on the controversial past that shapes the image of a very specific kind of imagined 'ancestor's world' separated from the official, 'compulsory' world of workplace or public space.*

*Keywords: Orthodox Old Believers, religious practices, socialism, spoken narratives, Latvia*



## Introduction

Russian Orthodox Old Believers represent quite a large religious group that maintained close links to the pre-reform Russian Orthodoxy (before the Russian Church Schism – *raskol* – in the mid-17th century) focused on the broadly defined form of religious rituals, including the tangible part of Orthodox Church heritage (late medieval icons and icons painting patterns, the 16th–17th century manuscripts and latest copies of them, old-print books, church items etc.), as well as intangible heritage of the late medieval Russian Orthodoxy (unison church singing (“sign singing” – *znamenny raspev*), some peculiarities of phonetic pronunciation by reading and singing conducting divine service, specific features of divine service rites, and ritual behaviour). Historically, since the late 17th century, in the territory of Latvia Old Believers are mostly represented as two priest-less denominations – *Fedoseevtsy* (sometimes also called Old Pomorian) and Pomorian (*pomortsy*). In contemporary Latvia there is only one small parish of Fedoseevtsy, the majority of Old Believers belong to the Pomorian Old Believers Church in Latvia. Quite recently, in 2016, the religious community of Old Believers was established admitting priesthood – *popovtsy* (the only one parish in Latvia accepting Belokrynica hierarchy). Although statistics could be not relevant in regards to the number of adepts of the Old Belief in Latvia particularly after World War II, the number of the Old Believers parishes (communities, *obshchiny*) was almost unchanged during the 2nd half of the 20th century – around 68 parishes (*Dannye o ...*), nowadays – 74 (2019) (Latvijas statistikas [...] 2021, 118). The Old Believers community historically is one of the largest religious groups in Latvia until today.

One of the significant characteristics describing the Old Believers community is their conservatism in religious practice and everyday life, consequently keeping a fairly large self-distance to the social environment of ‘others’. That could be explained not only by their legal discrimination in the Russian Empire (until October Manifesto 1905, issued by Emperor Nikolai II, promised to guarantee civil liberties and religious tolerance),

but also by their eschatological discourse concerned with the 'end times' and approaching the kingdom of Antichrist. Even the eschatological point of view created a stable platform for a strong collective religious and social identity in the Old Believers milieu and was a reason for their only partial (but successful) integration in the economic and political life in the Russian Empire after 1905, and later in the interwar period in the independent Republic of Latvia. Ability to use some specific kind of 'cultural diglossia' (capacity to undertake entrepreneur activities without refusing of strong religiosity and patriarchal patterns in everyday life) remarkably characterizes the peculiar social experience of this community and seems to be one of the main cultural mechanisms that has ensured existence of this group for more than 300 years.

Nevertheless, urbanization processes and improved social mobility essentially influenced the gradual secularization of the Old Believers community that occurred during the 1st half of the 20th century. In urban environment the Old Believers had less connection with the patriarchal order of rural way of life, as well as they were less engaged in the parish life on an everyday basis. In the period of the 1920s–1930s almost all children of Old Believers were involved in the public school education, acquired new opportunities for professional careers and personal life strategies. However, even in the 1930s the active Old Believers intellectuals tried to preserve traditional religious practice in order to integrate it in the school learning as an elective subject on the doctrine of the faith for the Old Believers students in Latvian schools (Pazuhina 2018, 377–412).

The new Soviet reality after World War II was not surprising for the Old Believers community regarding the increasing control and restrictions of public expressions of religious beliefs. However, their political experience during the period of the 1920s–1930s ensured illusionary trustiness that interaction with state institutions could be quite successful if played by the legal rules. In fact, religious policy during the Soviet period in the occupied Baltic States was not strategically consistent. Moreover, it

changed depending on the turns in foreign policy of the Soviet Union (Beliakova 2012, 428–469). The split between the declared policies and the practiced policies, inherent in the Soviet system, characterized also the relationship between the state and church (religious groups) in this period (White 1984). In these conditions religious practices of Old Believers returned to the realm of private life, designating the symbolical border between the ‘secular’ Soviet reality and habitual world of ancestors’ customs. The aim of this study is to investigate the forms revealed in religious behaviour in the Old Believers everyday experience during the Soviet period, as well as to contextualize estimations of safekeeping religious habits expressed in the Old Believers life stories regarding the authoritative discourse of the late socialism.

### Methodology

This article focuses on the narrative represented in the interviews with various generations of Latvian Old Believers about their everyday religious practices during the Soviet period recorded 2006–2016 in Latgale and archived at the Daugavpils University, as well as in a number of life stories of Old Believers recorded by the author of this article 2014–2016 in Rīga and archived in the author’s personal archive. In this study 12 interviews were carried out with respondents born in Latvia, in the 1920s–1930s, the 1940s, and the 1950s. The in-depth interviews were conducted by different interviewers, who were significantly younger than the respondents (in-depth interviews were recorded by the students during their field studies).

The considerable distance regarding the life experience between the participants of interviews often resulted in a detailed description of some everyday customs and verbal articulation of its meaning, as perceived by respondents at the moment of conversation. It helps to reconstruct some repeated social and cultural patterns which are not always rationalized by practitioners in an ordinary situation. Simultaneously, the lack of experience by the interviewers impedes to develop flexible communication with

respondents, thus they did not feel engaged to express their deepest reflections and attitudes.

The oral life stories as a specific type of in-depth interviews with a pliable structure and less controlled conducting permits to construct a narrative about the meanings of the everyday life order shared by respondents from their memories. Identifying reflections on religious practices and their meanings in respondents' perception, contextual analysis was applied as the most appropriate tool of exploration.

### The performative shift: between the discourses

Interviews with Old Believers, the generation born in the 1930–1940s, reveal consistency in terms of describing the ideological context of the 1960s–1970s. Respondents remember this time without special critical markers on the communist ideology or forced ideological control at school, university or workplace. They draw just vague contour of the ideological climate in that period, denoting a certain distance between the official 'public' discourse and their personal worldview. A remarkable example of the most frequently narrated contradicting plot is a retrospectively neutralized description of some ordinary situations in the 'generalized' Soviet period (without some chronological differentiation by asking).

#### *Example I: an interview with the daughter of the Old Believers nastavnik (clergyman)*

"But in Soviet times we continued to celebrate [church feasts], only in secret. It was not allowed. [It was] forbidden. During the Soviet Union even [pectoral] crosses were forbidden. But I always take it, also now [...] – *And did many people hide their beliefs in such a way?* – Yes, they did. – *But from whom did they hide?* – From the bosses [nachal'stvo], they chastised. – *But perhaps the bosses also believed in God?* – Might be, who knows it. – *But was there somebody who followed up people visiting prayer houses [molennye]?* – Yes, there was. They knew. – *Did they punish anybody?* – No, there were not any

punishments. They only talked about it [and asked] – what did you find in God, why did you go to the prayer house? That's all. I baptized both my daughters – one is born in 1956, the other – in 1961" (Female, born 1930, DU MV Nr. 760, 2008).

*Example II: an interview with the former construction worker*

"Regarding religion [in the Soviet period] it was contradictory: if somebody wanted to trust in God, he was despised. Also if somebody visited a church, or a prayer house. We were educated in that way: there is no God, there is no Church. But anyway... The parents told that the God does exist. We celebrated all church festivities – Christmas, Easter – that was a holy thing. *And were there any persecutions?* No, nothing. Sometimes they said to us that the God does not exist, but some people believed it, some people did not. Since then I am fairly tempered [*u menia eta zakalka*]" (Male, born 1943, DU MV 20, 2006).

These answers demonstrate a kind of axiological justification regarding the past situation, while the remembered everyday religious practices rooted in strong religious education within one's family are perceived as 'primary' normality, opposed to the 'external' impact of social contacts at workplace. During the Soviet period keeping the everyday order at least in her private life allowed the respondent to 'ignore' the contradictions between the remembered facts about the forbidden pectoral crosses and divine services in the church and despite this, the untroubled practicing of religious rituals, including baptizing (paradoxically it coincided with Nikita Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign). As anthropologist Alexei Yurchak pointed out in his analysis of the late Soviet period, "the performative shift of authoritative discourse that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s allowed Soviet people to develop a complexly differentiating relationship to ideological meanings, norms, and values" (Yurchak 2005, 28). His approach is similar to the statement expressed by philosopher Boris Groys in his essay *The Communist Postscript*. He underlined the

importance of language (discourse) as a medium of politics. From Groys's point of view, the communist revolution transferred ('transcribed') society from the medium of 'money' in the political discourse (like in capitalism, where the economic processes have exceptional significance for characterizing of social development, operating with numbers / statistics and omitting the possibility of verbal persuading) to the medium of language, when political doing is provided through the mastery of language (the official state propaganda, on the one hand, and criticism of the political regime, on the other hand) (Groys 2010, XXII–XXIII).

Referring to the 'linguistic turn' not only as to the research approach, but also as to the social and political practice, Yurchak stressed the role of performativity producing and circulating the authoritative discourse as a tool of (state) power implementation, as well as producing of meaning through the repetition of the authoritative speech. In his opinion, the 'shared' public discourse in the late socialist period was perceived as unavoidable and unchangeable, and its representation in various ritualized forms enabled the people to engage in shaping new, unanticipated meanings, that were not necessarily determined by ideological constative meanings of the authoritative discourse (Yurchak 2005, 27). Continuing the theme of unanticipated meanings, Groys noted certain 'immunity' of Soviet ideology regarding unreceptiveness to contradictions with reality. In his opinion "the basis for this immunity is Soviet ideology's conviction that the proof that its worldview is contradictory does not refute this worldview, but instead confirms it" (Groys 2010, 44). The mentioned features of the Soviet ideological discourse correlate with the social behaviour tactics of individuals. The paradox noted by Yurchak refers to the agential capacity – an ability to acquire the role of agent of a shared discourse, even if the values and aims of an individual did not match the ideals promised by the political system. The authoritative discourse of late socialism entailed internal displacements and mutations that did not contradict to the main political and ethical parameters of the whole system, but ensured an opportunity to create appropriate meanings in the 'gap' between rhetoric construction and real-life experience. Therefore, resistance capacity in its

pure expression was replaced by agentival capacity based on aiming for stability, stasis, predictability (Yurchak 2005, 28).

In case of the Old Believers life stories, this observation could explain relatively discreet criticism against the Soviet ideology provided by respondents. Retelling incidents of their life experience, each 'author' of biographic narrative creates some kind of appropriate memory space, neutralized discrepancy between his/her actual attitudes to the past events and the remembered image of himself/herself in the past. Some respondents articulated the psychological tension manifested in their everyday habitual behaviours by a forced choice between the religious patterns, mostly in a visible form of religious behaviour (wearing a cross pendant, making the sign of the cross by passing along the church, visiting the divine service on Sundays) and a professional career or education opportunities. Such tension in all cases could be avoided if there was no direct conflict with the authorities or colleagues and acquaintances, and if escape was sought into the internal world of one's private life, and in family. Moreover, the ultimate return to active religious practices, participation in the parish life and church divine services in most of the interviews was connected to the age of retirement (in the late Soviet period women could retire when they were 55 years old, men – when they were 60 years old, for some occupations the age limit was even lower).

On the one hand, the ability to adapt to the restrictions and relocation of religious practices only to the private domain could be explained from a pragmatic point of view, namely, in the social and political context of the Soviet period: public practicing of religious rituals certainly was not supported within the shared authoritative discourse based on scientific atheism and secular education model. In some careers of public sector, particular in education, media, and science, ideological control ensured by the representatives authorised by the Communist Party was very intense; however, on a lower social level this control was less evident. However, the social control and condemnation from others could be very significant impact for both distancing from the religion and social alienation in case of strong religiosity.

On the other hand, retrospective neutralization of the experienced contradictions reveals some kind of commemorative causality, while the most frequently remembered facts are used as the most convenient explanations. Maintaining the communicative memory in the Old Believers community historically was one of the most important tools to keep close the vertical bond between different generations. Furthermore, even the oral family narratives shaped the emotionally positive charged identification with the 'ancestor's life experience' and consequently with their religious statements. During the Soviet period, maintaining oral communication within the family was even more important because of inaccessibility of religious literature and religious education in parishes. Therefore storytelling (constructing of repeatable narratives) on successful practicing of religious rituals functioned as some kind of a 'missionary' activity, certainly in the sense of 'vernacular' understanding of the everyday religiosity.

### Escape-motivated shift: between various realities

In Orthodoxy, and particularly in the Russian Orthodox tradition, the everyday religious practices – namely home prayer, observance of fasts, celebrating church feasts, in the Old Believers milieu also daily reading of Psalter – are significant for the collective religious identity of believers, consequently ensuring recognition of the 'community of theirs' and distancing from the 'others' (in terms of Old Believers – the world of 'external'). In the everyday routine, some of the religious behaviour models, for example, praying during cooking and before eating, certain order of items in the house, choice of clothes, keeping up external appearances rooted in the religious education and patriarchal patterns etc., diffuse within habitual social practices, giving them some special dimension of belonging to some kind of a different experience. While these practices covered primarily the family life and the private life domain, their appropriation occurred gradually and started already in one's childhood at the early stage of socialization process.



In this sense, a threat that appeared as result of the widespread Soviet ideology was connected with the intervention of state institutions (mediated by kindergarten teachers, Communist party activists at all organizational levels) in the socialization and education process. Therefore, in those regions of Latvia (mostly rural Latgale), where that kind of impacts was weaker, for example, there were not enough kindergartens and children spent time with their grandparents, religious practices were maintained as part of the habitual life order and part of 'normality'. On the contrary, in cities, where the socialization process was institutionalized in ideologically controlled forms, expressions of everyday religiosity decreased evidently as result of introducing alternative everyday practices. Partly even pragmatic aspects caused it, people were motivated to achieve a more prestigious social status and to reach a more comfortable lifestyle. These were processes of individualization and autonomization within the Old Believers community that historically based their values on solidarity and internal bond. The new reality of *kolkhoz* (collective farm) in rural region of Latgale, where the Old Believers traditionally lived in isolated villages and were engaged in farming on their own piece of land, stimulated the young generation of Old Believers to leave villages and to move to the cities. The typical plot of biographical trajectory is about motivation on behalf of adults to study and to leave the *kolkhoz*.

*Example III: interview with the former saleswoman*

"Workers in the *kolkhoz* had to work very hard, in dirty boots [...] so that is why they [the adults] said to me: children, you have to study [in order] not to walk in boots. We all studied, nobody worked as an unskilled worker in the *kolkhoz*. We all received education and left the village" (Female, born 1937, DU MV 952, 2012).

In female narratives the theme of education as an opportunity to escape the hard reality of changed environment (destruction of private farms and forced collectivization at the end of the 1940s) appears quite

frequently and is accompanied by an emotionally positive attitude towards the opportunities to study and to find an appropriate job in the city (mostly in large cities, like Riga, Daugavpils, Rēzekne). Simultaneously, memories about collectivization clashed with traumatic memories about deportation, which also affected the Old Believers community. Among the Old Believers in Latgale there were many so-called 'middle peasants' [*seredniak*], land owners, whose land was nationalized. Evaluating these events, the respondents avoided to show their attitude in detail, answer very briefly.

*Example IV: interview with the former farmer*

"I was a farmer during the German [occupation] time [1941–1944], then the power changed. The soviet power came. We were called *kulaki* [prosperous peasants]. All was taken away. Horses. Animals. They took everything they could without saying 'thank you'. It was at the time, when Stalin commanded. ... But when they [organised deportations in 1949], my father came to me and we hid him. But they took my brother... They [deported him to] Siberia. Yes. And he has lived there until nowadays. He wanted to take our Latvian citizenship and to relocated back, but suddenly got sick" (Female, born 1920, DU MV 21, 2006).

*Example V: interview with the former functionary*

"*Kolkhozs* were not large: we lived in a village, there were approximately 20 houses in the village were, – that was the *kolkhoz*. My grandfather was quite prosperous, had two horses, several cows. [...] One of the neighbours became the boss, another became the chairman [of *kolkhoz*]. When people suddenly got such power, they wanted to demonstrate it. My grandfather was older and had a higher status, but now they could give him orders. They could take away his horses... It was hard. Perhaps he died ahead of time" (Male, born 1943, from the author's personal archive, 2016).

Summarizing the narratives reflected in life stories of Old Believers, whose active life was implemented in the period of the 1950s–1970s, emotional disappointment regarding Soviet reality could be noted. Consequently, Old Believers distanced themselves from the ideologically charged spheres of life in favour of the field of *métier* that would ensure stable income and relative non-interference into personal life by the state. This distancing marked a kind of estrangement, at least in a political sense, but partly also restricted socialisation of Old Believers in their everyday contacts. The metaphor of ‘elsewhere’ introduced by Alexei Yurchak describing the ‘Imaginary West’ in perception of Soviet people, could be expanded and extrapolated to a wider context of imagination of different reality as escaping from social frustration. In this sense, Yurchak’s concept on the image of the life abroad (*zagrannica*) in the late Soviet period stands out as a kind of archetypal idea of imagined cultural space that could not be encountered in reality, but rather produced as surrogate of the real inapproachable place (Yurchak 2005, 159). The interviews with Old Believers demonstrate an intention to move emphasis from the critical assessment of political reality to the possibilities of manoeuvring in this reality and an opportunity to escape from this reality as well. Expressions of religious behaviour in the daily life of Old Believers during the Soviet period mostly were reduced to the private sphere, keeping religious customs in the family life and family education. Even maintaining ‘ordinary’ elements of religious practice (wearing of a cross pendant, preserving family icons, following the cuisine traditions etc.) as not always rationalized as part of the everyday rhythms is seen by respondents as practiced ‘normality’, marking their affiliation with the ‘ancestors’ world’. Drawing parallels with the concept of the everyday life practice formulated by cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, the experience of Old Believers in the Soviet period could be described as ‘tactics’ in everyday activities that was aimed at appropriating the products (also the discourses) created by dominant institutions (De Certeau, 1984, 17).

## Conclusions

The life stories of Old Believers represent a very significant problem – conformity to the socialist reality and adaptation to the social norms, as well as inclusion in the social structures, that resulted as a distance from the believers' community in the everyday practices and individualization of the religious experience. In case of Old Believers as followers of the Russian Orthodox tradition, the collective experience of the divine service and praying is in core of the religious practice. The gradually disappearing bond between individuals and community slowly contributed to the destruction of the community life not only regarding the church rituals, but also religious education, diaconal work and involvement of the believers in maintaining common (intangible) cultural heritage. The 'visible' part of this heritage – old manuscripts, icons, crosses – were preserved more carefully as the 'family relics', and still form a significant basis for commemoration and identity shaping among Old Believers. Therefore, the historically established role of community decreased, but at the same time individual experience in terms of regular religious practice essentially increased signifying the importance of religious rituals in the everyday life as markers of cultural identity. Oral life stories reveal the memories on religious festivities during the Soviet period as specifically a 'home', family tradition interpreted rather in cultural than in a religious sense. In general, 'culturalization' of the religious rituals, norms of behaviour and social attitudes marked gradual secularization of the Old Believers milieu in the late Soviet period. The everyday practices preserved significant cultural experience almost unconverted in the entire period. At the same time, small shifts within a practice could remain imperceptible both for the practitioners and for external observers until an apparent rupture would mark a turning-point in some habitual action. This was the reason for the 're-birth' of the Old Believers activities in the late 1980s, for example in Rīga, re-establishing a group of activists within the Old Believers' Grebenščikov community, who researched traditional church singing and the so-called spiritual poetry (*dukhovnye stikhi* – a song genre rooted in

folk tradition, including folklorized church melodies and poetic texts based on the Bible plots). At the same time, it was a form of intellectual escapism to the ancestors' experience of the interwar period, when enthusiastic young Old Believers tried to preserve and partly to reconstruct the 'ancestors' traditions', thus reviving also everyday cultural practices, 'lost' under the secularization process in the Old Believers community. Undoubtedly, the level of secularization at the beginning of the 20th century and during the interwar period in Latvia was not so high, as it has been reached during the Soviet period under atheist propaganda and atheist approach in all areas of public education. But the intention of the Old Believers activists of that time was very similar to the attempts of the enthusiasts in the 1980s.

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Maija Grizāne

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## SOVIET SCHOOLS AND THE RELIGIOSITY OF THE OLD BELIEVERS' CHILDREN IN EASTERN LATVIA

*The article is focused on the analysis of the role of school education in secularising the Old Believer community in Latvia. By analysing the educational experience before the Soviet period and on the basis of oral testimonies, recorded from senior Old Believers in eastern Latvia from 2003 to 2021, the experience of Soviet school education and its impact on the preservation of religious practice is studied. In the Soviet period, school teachers became an instrument for wide dissemination of the Soviet worldview and the education of new Soviet citizens. According to various case studies, we can conclude that parents played a significant role in the interaction of their children with school teachers and often made the final decision on whether to force or not to maintain religious practice. Religious families, especially in the countryside, guaranteed private religiosity, despite the propaganda of atheism as part of communist society.*

**Keywords:** *Old Believers, Soviet Latvia, secularisation, religious education, Sovietisation of children*

### The Old Believer community in Latvia

The reforms of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1666–1667 and the following Schism divided the society into those, who stayed within the Church and accepted the novelties, and those, who were ready to defend the previous religious traditions at any cost. Called dissenters, the guardians of the old faith moved from the central territories of the Russian

Empire to places with less control of the state. After the execution of Archpriest Avvakum and his associates in Pustozersk in 1682 the movement became especially active (Zenkovsky 2006, 357).

The first Old Believers, who moved to the territory of Latvia, were Bespopovtsy (priest-less) which elected their spiritual leaders – *nastavniki*, also translated as 'leaders' or 'preceptors' (Robson 1993; Clay 2008). They were the followers of the Feodosiy Vasilyev conception and thus belonged to the Fedoseyevtsy denomination, which rejected matrimonies because of inability to provide the Sacrament of Marriage without priests (Zenkovsky 2006, 357–358). The first Old Believers' worship house was founded in the Liginishki village, which nowadays is a part of the Daugavpils City situated in eastern Latvia (Podmazov 2010, 9). Over time, the Old Believer community accepted the teaching of the Pomorian denomination and occupied the territory of south-eastern Latvia which nowadays retains the status of the Old Believers' centre of Latvia with more than 60 thousands of the followers (V redkom... 2020). At the moment, the Old Believers of Latvia are managed by the Old Orthodox Pomorian Church of Latvia which positions the community as a faithful follower of the pre-reform Russian Orthodoxy and the guardian of the ancestral faith.

## Materials and methods

The research is based on life-stories from the collection of the Oral History Centre of the Daugavpils University, Latvia. The testimonies were recorded in Russian language as self-told biographies from older generations of Old Believers in eastern Latvia during the field trips and individual interviewing from 2003 to 2021. The content analysis of the interviews, both audio records and transcriptions, demonstrated diversity of the respondents' experiences. The data were categorised according to the assessment of the results of the interaction between children, their parents and educational establishments, primary and secondary schools. By combining research methods, we may obtain an accurate picture of the causes



and results of the school atheist propaganda and its impact on children's minds, as well as the role of family and community in the process.

The formation of children's religiosity within Sovietisation is studied on the basis of theory, which underlines the importance of the impact of social environment. Karen Horney (1885–1952) has proved the undeniable influence of the social environment on the development of a personality, especially in one's childhood (Horney, 1950). She saw the basis of a person's motivation in anxiety, which makes a person strive for security, and in which there is a need for self-realization. According to Horney, it is vitally important to maintain relationships with people and oneself, so that the surrounding reality does not conflict with the inner world. During the Soviet period, however, living a double life was imposed by circumstances. In their hearts, people could think whatever they wanted, but in plain sight, in public, they had to portray the right Soviet citizens leading the country to the bright communist future.

Horney has also explained the important role of religion to satisfy psychological needs of a person. The deprivation of religiosity as a system of ideas makes people suffer and look for new neurotic decisions (Horn 1997, 16). In this case, Horney's idea about constitution of "private religion" in searching for glory acquires a valid interpretation in relation to Sovietisation (Horney 1950, 30). Robert Tucker (1918–2010), developing Horney's theory, in his works *Stalin as Revolutionary: 1879–1929* (1973) and *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (1992) proved that Joseph Stalin, being a person of an arrogant-vindictive type, made his "private religion" a universal state cult. Stalin merged his cult with general ideas of the development of Communism as a fundamental condition for achieving the happiness of the whole society, and vindictive triumph, and vindication of the used means had to become an entire way of the social life (Cooper 2003, 117). Such individuals have an overwhelming need for vindictive triumph. In fact, vindication, or vengeance, becomes an entire way of life. This compulsive need for vindication is often accompanied by extreme competitiveness. They want to intimidate others into a subdued position. Thus, Stalin's cult clashed with traditional

religious ideas and tried to displace and substitute it. This way, the Soviet 'religion' was the one, which, according to Horney's theory, is a neurotic parent demanding that people sacrifice their true self for his glory (Horni 1997, 17). Moreover, sacrificing in the interests of the regime was the basis of the Soviet reality. In respect to the development of Old Belief, sacrificing in the interests of the faith was one of the cornerstones of the fight against the pressure of the tsar and the reformed Russian Orthodox Church. In this case, both sacrificing motives were in opposition to each other: the Soviet one covered all Soviet society and the Old Believers' one was to protect the community. The Old Believers, being a truly patriarchal and family-oriented, had hopes on families who had to preserve religious traditions. Moreover, the families were those, who provided proper education in those periods when the official Old Believers' schools were outlawed. It took a long time to legislate Old Belief as religion and to create educational traditions for preserving and passing the teaching to the descendants.

### The religious education of Old Believers before 1940

Throughout the 19th century the question on Old Believers' education, both religious and secular, was a pressing problem for the community on the territory of eastern Latvia. The largest Old Believers' educational centre in the Baltics was created in 1813 within the Grebenshchikov Old Believers' parish in Riga. Already in 1883, it was closed in accordance with the decision of the Livonia governor general Filippo Paulucci delle Roncole (Baranovskij & Potashenko 2005). For a long time Old Believers could only be educated through home-schooling. As an alternative, their children could attend the Orthodox Church parish schools or public schools (known as national/popular schools). However, in these schools, only Orthodox religious tradition was taught and consequently non-Orthodox pupils were supposed to convert to Orthodoxy someday. In 1873, the Grebenshchikov Old Believers' parish school resumed its activities, but still it was not accessible for all Old Believers' children. The school

in Riga was one of the only three legal Old Believers' schools in the territory of the Russian Empire (Kozhurin 2017).

It should be recognized that the issue on religious literacy of the population was crucial not only among the Old Believers, but also among the Orthodox. At the end of the 19th century, peasants were largely unable to read the prayer books and recognise the meaning of church service. The chief prosecutor of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonoscev (1827–1907; held the post from 1880 to 1905) ascertained that in remote places of the country local Christians did not understand the words of the service and recited *Our Father* with so many mistakes that the prayer lost its sense (Pobedonoscev 1901). This was the argument for Pobedonoscev to support the parish schools rather than the public ones, because, in his opinion, the churchmen are those who were able to provide the best education in the spirit of traditional Russian Orthodoxy (Istorija Rossii 2009, 103; Rozhdestvenskij 1902, 649).

At the end of the 19th century, the territory of eastern Latvia was a part of the Vitebsk Province and Polotsk eparchy. According to the report on the number of schools in 1885 there were 43 Orthodox church parish schools with 659 boys and 121 girls as pupils among which there were not only Orthodox, but representatives of Edinoverci, Catholics, Lutherans, Jews and Old Believers which were much less in number (Polockie eparhial'nye vedomosti 1885, N 24, 797–808; 1886, N 16 1–7). In 1890 more than 80% of children, including Orthodox, did not attend any schools and remained illiterate (Otchjot o sostojanii... 1891, 12). Therefore, religious education as well as the secular one was a prerogative of upper social classes, meantime the majority of local inhabitants used home-schooling as the main way to provide young generations with knowledge and skills. Obviously, with this approach, a lot depended on the private capabilities of the specific families.

After the Edict of Toleration, promulgated on 17 April 1905, Old Believers received the rights to found primary schools at their own expense in places of compact residence. The schools were controlled by the Ministry of National Education, which approved educational programs

and teachers (*Vysochajshe utverzhdennoe polozhenie...* 1908). From 1906 to 1911 in the territory of eastern Latvia there were opened 17 Old Believers' primary schools: in Griva (nowadays included in the Daugavpils City), Ilukste, Subate, Volodina, Borovka, Niderkuni etc. (Potashenko 2005). Therefore, the reason for the lack of education was not the unwillingness of the Old Believers or their inability to provide appropriate conditions, but specifically the lack of a legal framework on the part of the state. This conclusion is confirmed by the next important stage of development during the period of the independent Republic of Latvia.

The newly established Republic of Latvia stimulated political, economic and cultural development of the Old Believer community as an ethnic and religious minority. The population census data on 1935 reveals that about 5.5 per cent (107 195 persons) of the inhabitants identified themselves as Old Believers (*Population of Latvia by Religious Affiliation 1935*). The community benefited from the same freedom of faith on a par with other confessions of the country as well as received various benefits, allowances and other types of support from the state.

The Central Committee for the Affairs of Old Believers in Latvia (*Central'nyj komitet po delam staroobrjadcev Latvii*), founded in 1920, became a moderator and a trustee of the Old Believers' parishes and took over the implementation of the community's self-government. At the same time, new cultural and educational organisations were founded, and the already existing ones continued their work, which dealt with issues of religious education of both children and adults and contributed to ground approaches to developing religious tradition both within the parishes, public schools and through public events.

Since the 1920s, the problem of insufficient number of Russian minority schools went along with the insufficiency of teachers of religion<sup>1</sup> among Old Believers. The previously existed restrictions on education within the tradition of Old Belief resulted in the lack of competent

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<sup>1</sup> The school subject was called "Zakon Bozhij" [The Law of God] and was taught by teachers of the "Zakon Bozhij". For a simpler understanding, the term "teachers of religion" will be used in the text below.

teachers and problems with the educational tradition itself. Home-schooling was unable to provide a systematic approach in training of qualified teachers which would have necessary knowledge and skills. During the Fourth Congress of Old Believers on 10-11 January, 1924, the head of the Old Believer Society in Latvia (*Staroobrjadcheskoe obshhestvo Latvii*), Fjodor Pavlov claimed that for 73 thousands of Old Believers among 91 thousands of Russians, only four of the 200 Russian minority schools provided teachers of religion from Old Believers. Meanwhile the majority of the teachers of religion were Russian Orthodox, which taught within the Orthodox religious tradition. These circumstances strengthened Old Believers' mistrust in public schools and increased the reluctance to send their children to schools (4-j vselatvijskij s'ezd... 1924). In autumn of 1924, the Central Committee for the Affairs of Old Believers in Latvia published the first tutorial on Old Believers' religious tradition (*Staroobrjadcy vvodjat... 1924*). This was a significant step towards establishing the educational tradition within the Old Believers' community of Latvia in the 20th century.

The head of the Council of Old Believers' Synods and Congresses of Latvia (*Soviet staroobrjadcheskih Soborov i s'ezdov Latvii*) and the deputy of the Latvian Parliament Stephan Kirillov achieved the organization of courses for teachers of religion in the Daugavpils City. The government provided funds both for the courses themselves and for the scholarships to 30 teachers, who took part in the courses. During the courses, 165 lectures were presented on history, Christian apologetics, catechism, theory and practice of church singing, icon painting, Latvian language, history and geography of Latvia, and pedagogy. Next year, courses under the same program were organised (Podmazovs 2001, 121). Therefore, Old Believers were interested not only in legalising their religious education, but also in special training for the teachers of religion and improvement of their qualification.

Since the early 1930s, Old Believers had begun to take an active part in preparing the curriculum at the national level of education. In June 1931, during the First Congress of the Old Believers' Teachers of Religion

the curriculum was developed. The curriculum was approved by the Ministry of Education, and a special committee was established. This committee issued 17 permanent and 72 temporary work permits for the Old Believers' teachers (Podmazovs 2001, 121). Altogether 83 teachers received the rights to teach the tradition of Old Belief in public schools. This approach of establishing special commissions for each confession to develop curricula and to control teachers of religion through the Ministry of Education was adopted by the government of Karlis Ulmanis on 30 July 1934 (Adamovičs 1935). In this way, the collaboration between the leaders of religious groups and the state was stimulated, and the state power confirmed its interest in religious education as such.

During the Second Congress of the Old Believers' Teachers of Religion in August 1935, the existing curriculum of the subject "Religion" (*Zakon Bozhij*) was improved and the necessity to organise special training courses for the teachers of religion was announced (Podmazovs 2001, 122). The government supported this initiative, and since 1937, all teachers of religion from the Old Believer and Orthodox communities had to pass exams on Latvian language or attend language courses which were organised by the Ministry of Education (Latviešu valodas...1937; Kursi skolotājiem 1938; Angļu valodas kursus 1938; Sarīkojumi... 1938). Commonly, these courses were organised during summer holidays, and teachers of religion together with Orthodox missionaries mastered the following academic subjects: Latvian language, history and geography of Latvia, teaching methodology and practice of religion (Metropolits Augustins... 1937). Thus, Old Believers and the Orthodox of Latvia were unified during the courses as carriers of a Christian tradition, belonging to the same Russian culture. These courses stimulated the qualification of the Old Believer teachers of religion and their introduction to the national system of education as well as positively influenced the Old Believers' common educational level and their integration in Latvian society. The collected testimonies of Old Believers clearly indicate that the Old Believers of Latvia undoubtedly disassociated themselves from the later power of 'the Soviets' and recognized themselves as

an integral part of the local population and the state of Latvia (Sale-niece 2007).

Oral testimonies of the Old Believers, who attended school in the interwar period, prove that public schools provided lessons of religion to the pupils according to their confessional affiliation. Usually, these were clergymen with special education and qualification, which were called by the Old Believers *verouchiteli* (literally ‘teachers of faith’; DU MV 179; DU MV 239; DU MV 411; DU MV 726; DU MV 728; DU MV 760; DU MV 981; DU MV 784; DU MV 794). However, sometimes, due to the lack of professional teachers, local clergymen or even parents, who were considered as competent, could teach the lesson of religion (DU MV 411; DU MV 609). The unavailability of the schoolbooks on religion was a significant problem, but the respondents remember the usage of them during the lessons, too (DU MV 794). For some respondents the lesson of religion was perceived as the most important school subject, which even was “in the first place in the certificate”, and nowadays they remember these lessons as something extremely valuable for them as religious people (DU MV 981). They vividly remember the ‘sudden’ termination of religion lessons, as soon as the Second World War started.

Many respondents outlined the tradition of morning prayers before lessons (DU MV 728). Some of the respondents even emphasised that they “prayed for Latvia” and every Monday sang the hymn (DU MV 411; DU MV 1097). A respondent remembered: “Before the class an attendant had to read a prayer. Any prayer. And when we went home [after the lessons], too. It was his duty” (DU MV 794). Another respondent informed that in their school an attendant had to read *Our Father*, while other pupils had to stand up and recite together (DU MV 21). There are also memories that there was an icon in a school corridor, and all pupils had to pray in front of it: “Only after reading a prayer we could go to classes and study” (DU MV 73). Others remembered an icon in their own classroom (DU MV 784). There are also memories about the obligatory religious service, organised in a prayer house, devoted to the beginning of the new school year: “All of us, pupils, were brought to a prayer house. We

all went, and prayed, and the *batjushka* [Nastavnik] prayed" (DU MV 681). This example demonstrates the reverent attitude towards both religious traditions and education by the whole community, and this combination had to be passed to younger generations. Thus, the environment of the interwar schools of Latvia stimulated pupils' religiosity, and the maintained traditions of the everyday public praying made it a collective experience, which united pupils and teachers and was supported by the clergymen and the state. Religious practice was a common everyday issue, which contributed to preserving and developing of the Old Believers' traditions as a legal and cultural norm.

Since the legalisation of Old Belief in 1906 until the first Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940, the Old Believer community, in cooperation with the state authorities, was able to recreate the traditions of religious education and foster several generations of believers. Thereby, by the beginning of the Sovietisation, the Old Believer community of Latvia had accumulated experience of religious educational traditions, teachers and educational materials, which helped preserving religiosity during the atheist era. However, the developed self-awareness of the community with strong backgrounds and long-standing history of surviving under unfavourable conditions was the decisive factor in the survival of the Old Believer community of Latvia.

### The role of schools in the Sovietisation of the Old Believers' Children

According to Horney's concept, it is the social environment, which is decisive in the development of a personality. It should be noted that in the process of Sovietisation, school as an institution played a crucial role. A child had to deal with the teachers' authority and classmates as a collective authority exploited by teachers, who used 'upbringing' and/or psychological pressure as a tool of propaganda of the new Soviet values. Unlike the interwar period, when pupils and teachers were united within the common social religiosity and tolerant attitude to all confessional traditions,



the new Soviet teachers had to deny any religiosity and teach communist values. Religiosity was not a collective routine anymore: it had become a personal choice, and children were the most vulnerable and unprotected in these conditions.

Pupils were indoctrinated in classes: “We were brought up [at school], [being told] that there was no religion, no God, no servants of cult” (DU MV 20). If there were religious parents, children could have been taught religiosity in secret: “Still (..) parents said there was God and in secret, in secret from everybody, they led us to the prayer house, church etc., and all the holidays such as Christmas and Easter were celebrated” (DU MV 20). In some families despite the restrictions, the parents considered baptising a vital necessity for their children and a sign of belonging to Old Belief: “Nevertheless, my children and grandchildren – all were baptised. No communists or somebody else can problematize my faith, and it will be as I want it to be!” (DU MV 1039). Sometimes, baptising took place in threatening circumstances, because in case of unveiling, a person could be made redundant: “I tried [to hide], but in 1948 I christened my nephew. However, I was acting in such a way so that nobody detected me. If I was detected, of course, I would have had problems” (DU MV 784). In some families, parents just abandoned religious life after receiving threats from the employer because of practicing religion: “And he [the employer] promised to fire me. (..) I had to work. If they fired me, how could I find a job? (..) Religion was prohibited” (DU MV 457).

If parents were scared to lose jobs, children were scared of public shaming. Those, who were observed practicing religion, for instance, by attending a religious service, were denounced and exposed to public humiliation: “All of us were asked about why we attended the prayer house, and after that – public disgust” (DU MV 730). Teachers used classmates to influence religious children and threaten them with excluding from the collective by tracking down and through public ridiculing. Quite often, the teachers were those, who made lists of the children who attended a religious service and censured them in front of the classmates

(Saleniece 2017). These teachers deliberately exposed children to public shaming because of their religiosity and in this way tried to achieve their renunciation of faith. For Old Believers it could become a difficult choice, because previously their ancestors had to survive through various obstacles to preserve their religious traditions, and because of the pressure from teachers, the children had to betray what the previous generations of their relatives had protected.

Prioritising the needs of the collective over the needs of an individual facilitated the psychology of the majority or even the herd instinct when it became prestigious to belong to the 'right' group. As grouping people according to invented categories was a part of the Sovietisation process, distinguishing between those, who are 'with us' and 'against us', for young individuals the pioneers<sup>2</sup> became the first conscious step on the way of belonging to the Soviet system. For many Old Believers' children it was a challenging decision – to become a pioneer or not. In some families, parents were definitely against their children becoming pioneers, because it was evident that pioneers were not religious, but atheist and propagating atheist ideas. A respondent remembered: “[My parents] did not want to allow me [to become a pioneer]. Then little by little, there appeared one, two, three [pioneers] in the class, they were wearing those horrible ties. Then everything became ordinary. Agitation campaigns began (..) on all this anti-religion” (DU MV 730). Primary schools were closely associated with pioneer organizations that is why for many parents “those horrible ties” – the red ties of pioneers – became a symbol of their children's secularisation – distancing from what the parents themselves kept so carefully. Besides, all pioneers gave a promise to fight for the Communist Party, follow the teaching of Lenin and become propagators of atheism, which especially caused resistance in rural areas (Spring 2012). For religious parents it was abnormal to accept the ideas of pioneers and tolerate their children as members of this organisation. However, sometimes they had to make exceptions.

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<sup>2</sup> We do not have any memories about a younger group – Octobrists. Supposedly, this is due to a very young age (7–9 years).

All over the country, pupils had to wear red ties at school as a symbol of belonging to pioneers. Usually, all pupils, who were 9 years old, became pioneers, so they had to wear the red ties all the time while they were in the premises of the school. However, not all of the pioneers joined the Komsomol (DU MV 794). Some of the respondents noticed that they deliberately avoided joining the Komsomol and tried to save their children from joining the pioneers. A respondent, born in 1921, from a very religious and practicing family described a case of her son who had to become a pioneer, because he was “a high-achieving pupil”, and thus he had to wear “that red tie”. The parents and the adult neighbours were very negative about wearing the tie, so the boy usually left it at school or was criticised by the adults for having it on his neck (DU MV 728). For religious adults the red pioneers’ ties worn by their children was a sign of atheistic communism and a symbol of a hostile worldview. On the opposite, Old Believers had to wear cross pendants as a sign of their belonging to the ancestors’ spiritual tradition.

The problem was that Old Believers, as well as representatives of other religious groups, were proscribed to wear cross pendants and any other symbols of religion, and it was a special challenge to do that: “Even wearing cross pendants was forbidden, but I always did it” (DU MV 760). Old Believers’ children usually wore cross pendants in an unnoticeable manner: girls attached the cross pendants to a bra and boys – to the underside of a shirt (DU MV 794). A respondent noticed that nobody explained why it was prohibited to wear a cross pendant: “It was forbidden and that’s it!” (DU MV 794). However, “there were a few teachers, who forbade, while others allowed it” (DU MV 794). There were also teachers, who did not pay any attention to these attributes of religion because they understood the necessity for Christians to wear cross pendants as a symbol of their faith.

In some cases, wearing cross pendants became a reason for a conflict between teachers, classmates and parents. A respondent provided information on her daughter’s experience, who attended school in the late 1950s–1960s (DU MV 759). Once before the gym class, when changing

clothes, someone noticed that there was a rope on the girl's neck. The classmates asked: "Do you want to hang yourself?" This made everybody laugh. "The rope", which was noticed, was needed to carry a cross-pendant – an obligatory attribute of every Old Believer which "had to be worn since it was put on" (DU MV 759). In this case, the classmates, not a teacher, initiated public shaming. The girl was ridiculed in public, so after coming home she told her mother: "Mom, nobody has a cross [pendant], but I am with a cross [pendant], they are laughing at me!" (DU MV 759). It is not known whether there were any other pupils having cross pendants, but in this particular situation, the girl occurred to be the only one in front of the collective. This made her feel exceptional, but in the negative sense. The mother was asked to visit the class teacher. During the talk, the teacher did not refer to communism or atheism, or any other ideology, she just asked: "Why are you destroying the child's soul?" In teacher's mind, "destroying the soul" meant exposing a child to bullying because of not following "the right" worldview and not being like others – the collective. The teacher emphasised that the classmates were laughing at the girl and that was the reason why it was suggested to take the cross pendant off. The reaction of the mother demonstrated her wish to protect the daughter and the absence of fear of the Soviet system represented by the school teacher: "[Teacher's name]", if it is about schooling, tell me, we'll solve it, but this [cross-pendant], this is our, parents', business!" The situation was resolved in favour of the girl and her mother: "She [my daughter] finished school and nobody said anything to her" (DU MV 759). The mother claimed that the question on religiosity was a private matter, which, according to her, the state must not interfere with.

It should be recognised that the state was not able to look under everyone's clothes and check whether they were wearing a cross or an icon. However, the state could use efforts to change the external manifestations of religiosity, namely, to prohibit celebrating religious holidays and replace them with the secular ones. In Latvia, as well as in other parts of the Soviet country, new holidays were introduced, and schools took an active part in developing them, too (Kiope et al. 2020).

Some Old Believers did agree, that they could not celebrate religious holidays in the way they did before the Soviet regime, yet the holidays were not forbidden completely: “Hey, we were not forbidden! We continued going to the prayer house like we used to do it before. Who had forbidden? Well, we did not celebrate in the way we did before. Nobody forbade. We went and prayed” (DU MV 681). In some cases, parents were those, who insisted on children’s religious practice. Answering the question about the religious life during the Soviet period, a respondent said: “It was forbidden. But my parents wanted me to be religious, my mother forced me [to practice religion]. I went to a prayer house with my schoolmates” (DU MV 168). Noteworthy, in the mentioned case practicing religion was a decision of several parents: the classmates of the respondent were involved in the activities, which were forbidden by the regime, but forced by the adults. For Old Believers, celebrating religious holidays is closely connected with religious service, so, in case they had an opportunity to attend a prayer house on special days according to the tradition of Old Belief, they interpreted this as living without any major restrictions on practicing religious traditions. This situation was typical for those, who lived in the countryside and did not hold high public positions, so they were not afraid of redundancy because of their religious life-style.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, the practice of surveillance and denunciations was widespread in schools, too. Those pupils, who were noticed attending religious services, were put under special control (DU MV 760). A respondent, born in 1930, noticed that it was forbidden to celebrate religious holidays and to go to prayer houses, and there were those, who reported about this; however, people were never punished (DU MV 760). Usually only those families, who were closely connected to practicing religion, for example, having clergymen or teachers of religion as relatives, could be persecuted and controlled thoroughly (DU MV 239).

Religious holidays were not celebrated at schools, and one of the respondents commented: “They did not celebrate Christmas or so. Everything was going on in the village; they celebrated their [religious] holidays. While in the education of young people, everything was already going as

it should have been” (DU MV 981). The respondent divided the two environments, which influenced Old Believers' children: village (family/community) with its traditional religiosity and school (state) with the 'right' approach. The Soviet antireligious approach to education became the norm and religious practice had to stay a secret, underground phenomenon that was practiced in closed social groups like 'villages' and/or families.

External attributes and decorations played a crucial role in development of celebrating Soviet fests at schools. A respondent described, how they decorated their classroom before the holiday on 1st of May: “We went to the forest, cut birches, brought them to school and put into pails. [...] It was customary to decorate portraits [of Lenin and Stalin] with wreaths of lingonberry branches. [...] There were competitions on the best decorated classroom” (DU MV 794). The former integral attributes of the class – icons depicting Christ, the Mother of God, and the Saints – were replaced with portraits of the Communist Party leaders. In some way, this corresponds with the idea of having a 'red corner' which was supposed to be in every pioneer's home by the *Young Pioneer Leader's Handbook* (Spring 2012). The portraits at school all the time had to remind the pupils about the fathers of communism and decorating them on holidays stimulated the enforcement of the cult. In this way, the school's social environment was adjusted to educating true Soviet citizens from families, who were actively engaged in religious practice in a very recent past. The cult of the Communist Party leaders had to supersede any religious traditions and unite the enormous territory of very different peoples and cultures.

## Conclusions

The Old Believer community in Latvia experienced different political regimes: the Russian Empire stated the illegal position of the followers and insisted on converting to the Orthodoxy, the Republic of Latvia provided freedom of faith and support of religious education, and the USSR denied any religiosity and proclaimed communism as the only true value

for the people. The interwar period played a significant role in maintaining Old Believers' religiosity under the Soviet atheist regime by forming resistant religious generations with grounded religious upbringing and the feeling of belonging to the Latvian state with Christian values. The social environment of the interwar schools promoted maintaining of Old Believers' traditions as collective experience for children and adults and a norm of everyday life.

After establishing the Soviet regime, in the course of Sovietisation, the environment was divided into public (atheist and collective) and private (religious and family/community). Being a part of a collective at school under the control of teachers, children had to follow 'the right upbringing' and accept the values of the Soviet system. In families, according to the parents' choice, the children most likely stayed religious, at least formally, and became a part of underground, private religious traditions. The parents preserved the knowledge as well as the schoolbooks of the interwar Latvia and were able to provide their children with the basics of the Old Belief teaching, at least, during the first period of the Soviet regime. The next generations, detached from the experience of the interwar generations, were more easily secularized (Sovietized) and more often rejected any manifestation of religiosity, thereby compromising the preservation of the integrity of the Old Believer community and its traditions.

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## THE STRATEGIES OF ESCAPISM IN THE *HOMO SOVIETICUS* REALITY: ART IN CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL PERIPHERY OF SOVIET LATVIA

*This article is focused on the question of cultural practices and artistic strategies that were implemented by artists in Latvia in the late socialist period. In order to seek for more autonomy and alternative forms of creativity in the atheist and ideologically permeated state and social structures, artists in Latvia explored the opportunities to engage in art and cultural practices that differed from the dogmatic canon of Socialist Realism. In this way, they created a parallel reality where they could distance themselves from the absurd Homo Sovieticus world and remain immune against indoctrination and internalisation of Soviet values. However, it is also problematic to draw the boundaries between the official and the non-official art. The task of contemporary art historians is thus to revise history and contextualise deviations from Socialist Realism, which despite the control and censorship, did manage to co-exist in parallel with the official domain.*

*Keywords: non-official art, Homo Sovieticus, performance art, escapism, late socialist period, Latvia*

### Research challenges

The late socialist period is challenging in terms of research, since it is a rather recent past and historiography still has many gaps. Moreover, several researchers have noticed many problematic assumptions in discussing the late socialist period. For example, Alexei Yurchak, professor in anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, points out that

these assumptions include the following: socialism was ‘bad’ and ‘immoral’ and binary categories are used to describe Soviet reality as “oppression and resistance, repression and freedom, the state and the people, official economy and second economy, official culture and counterculture, totalitarian language and counterlanguage, public self and private self, truth and lie, reality and dissimulation, morality and corruption” (Yurchak 2005, 5).

Some researchers, such as Irina Uvarova and Kirill Rogov, have suggested that the Soviet culture can be divided into censored and uncensored (Yurchak 2005, 6). According to Yurchak, this terminology highlights the ambivalence of cultural production in the Soviet Union; however “it still reduces Soviet reality to a binary division between the state (censored) and the society beyond it (uncensored), failing to account for the fact that many of the cultural phenomena in socialism that were allowed, tolerated, or even promoted within the realm of the officially censored were nevertheless quite distinct from the ideological texts of the Party” (Yurchak 2005, 5). It can be argued that these binary categories originated under the conditions of the Cold War, “when the entity of ‘the Soviet bloc’ had been articulated in opposition to ‘the West’” (Yurchak 2005, 7) resulting in “many metaphors that set a sort of dichotomy between ‘us-them’, according to the dominance of the two empires: the USA and the USSR” (Banaszkiewicz et al 2016, 110).

If Western Europe was separated from the Soviet sphere of influence with the ‘Iron Curtain’, Latvia, along with the other two Baltic States – Lithuania and Estonia –, as well as today’s Ukraine and Belarus were in the area of the Soviet Union infrastructure, where Moscow’s sphere of influence in terms of ideology, politics, economy and culture was the most evident. The so-called Satellite States – Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, East Germany – were further to the West and enjoyed greater political or economic freedom (Banaszkiewicz et al 2016, 110). Therefore, when carrying out research of the historical and political context in the previous Soviet bloc (also called ‘Eastern bloc’) countries, the heterogeneity and diversity of the region must be acknowledged to avoid superficial simplifications. Moreover, as stated by Magdalena

Banaszkiewicz, associate professor in intercultural studies at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and Nelson Graburn, professor in sociocultural anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, USA, “it is very insofar significant that for many years mainly Western researchers wrote about the events happening behind the Iron Curtain. There was actually no account ‘from the inside’, which would reach wider reception” (Banaszkiewicz et al 2016, 110). Local researchers coming from East-Central Europe “constitute an interesting and important counterpoint to the research from the Anglo-Saxon perspective” (Banaszkiewicz et al 2016, 110), and such heteroglossia is crucial to achieve more objective research results examining the very complex historical and political context in the socialist period.

It must be noted, though, the socialist period has not been thoroughly examined in the art discourse locally. According to Latvian art critic Vilnis Vējš, this period “was characterised by massive control of society and personal life in which every form of expression, including creativity, had a set place” (Vējš 2010, 25), whereas Elita Ansonē writes that “the Soviet era conjures up negative emotions. That is why we have done little work in relation to Socialist Realism since the restoration of Latvia’s independence in 1991” (Ansonē 2009, 66). These *a priori* negative emotions also cause a problem in the research of art history: “In general terms, the art of Socialist Realism has been seen as something that was bad, political, commissioned, literary, natural, not really artistic – something, in short, which has nothing to do with ‘good art’” (Ansonē 2009, 66). In the neighbouring country Estonia a book entitled *Lost Eighties* was published in 2010 by the Center of Contemporary Arts. In the foreword art historian Sirje Helme writes that “the eighties have been dealt with the least. It has been a popular notion that the eighties were a time when nothing happened; everything was stamped upon by the strict heel of stagnation and if anything was happening, it was probably a clone of the ideas and achievements of the previous decades” (Helme 2010, 5). This approach is not productive in terms of analyzing the diversity, versatility and plurality of heterogeneous genres, movements and directions, which developed in this

period beyond the dogmas of Socialist Realism – the dominant aesthetic theory and practice in the Soviet Union, which “in itself [is] increasingly hard to define” (Bužinska 2010, 26).

It cannot be denied that “the Soviet system produced tremendous suffering, repression, fear and lack of freedom” (Yurchak 2005, 8), but “what tends to get lost in the binary accounts is the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that, for great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life (such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future) were of genuine importance” (Yurchak 2005, 8). Neringa Klumbyte, professor in anthropology at the Miami University, USA, points out that “this period is also different because of gradual societal changes, such as liberalization of the social order and moves away from the revolutionary values of asceticism, collectivism, and proletarianism, that prepared people for the coming state-initiated shift toward regime liberalization in the mid- and late-1980s” (Klumbyte 2013, 3). Therefore, modern-day researchers have the challenging task to reconstruct the ethical and aesthetic complexities of socialist life, and “the challenge of such a task is to avoid a priori negative accounts of socialism without falling into the opposite extreme of romanticizing it” (Yurchak 2005, 9-10).

As regards this period in the historiography of Latvia, it is an important task for the modern-day researchers to analyze the 1960s–1980s period, because after the independence of Latvia was restored in the 1990s the research of this historical period nearly stopped and it could be explained with the hierarchy of priorities (Ivanovs 2007, 30). The historians mostly paid attention to the painful and tragic events in the history of Latvia – the occupation of Latvia, repressive politics implemented by the German and Soviet Union occupation regimes, and sovietization of Latvia; however, the 1960s-1980s period was not a research priority (Ivanovs 2007: 31). Scholars who included late socialism in their works usually associated this period with ‘stagnation’ – a time when there was relatively no change in the economy, society, or politics, whereas

the revolutionary and the Stalinist periods seemed more captivating than the era of relative stability (also explained by the opening of Soviet archives and new opportunities to revisit the Soviet past) (Klumbyte 2013, 2). The situation has slightly changed since 2014, when a special Government Commission for the KGB Research was established in Latvia. In the period from 2015 to 2018 the Commission published five volumes of 13 scholarly articles and reports dedicated to the research of the totalitarian regime and its chief government agency – the Committee for State Security (the KGB) – based on the available archive documents.

Latvian historian Daina Bleiere explains that the subject of repressions and the manifestations of political power exercised by Moscow – the totalitarian model – is popular in Latvian post-Soviet historiography because in Latvia, as well as in Estonia and Lithuania, “the Soviet regime was forced from outside, so the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet perspective reflects not only a purely normative attitude – the Soviet regime was brutal and bad – but also a view on the Soviet regime as an outside force that had no roots in Latvia and that had failed to conquer Latvian affection. Relations between the centre (Moscow) and the periphery (Riga), as well as the relations between society and power structures are perceived as distinctly vertical, forced and asymmetric” (Bleiere 2012, 33).

In this context, it is also very problematic to use the sources written in the 1960s–1980s period, because they were ideologically biased and apologetic of the Soviet regime, since the meaning and content of the Soviet politics were interpreted as the increase of welfare, development of economics and culture, etc. When examining the history and historiography of the late Soviet period, a critically new research approach is needed, asking new questions and providing new perspectives. It can be questioned whether the late Soviet socialism can only be understood and explained in “orientalist idioms, namely, as backward, oppressive, irrational and immoral” (Klumbyte 2013, 2), or the change of paradigm is needed in order to obtain a more detailed image of this sociocultural phenomena (opposed to the cliché of a Cold War dichotomy). Since the

overlooked or misunderstood phenomena need to be re-addressed and the established views must be questioned and, if possible, re-interpreted, legitimate historical revisionism must be carried out.

### The borderline between the official and non-official art

The 'official' art of many socialist countries was Socialist Realism: "Socialist Realism replaced the heterogeneous artistic endeavours of the Russian avant-garde and became the dominant aesthetic theory and practice in the Soviet Union. Social realist art proclaimed an antiformalist politics of representation that propagated the building of socialism and the performative creation of reality not yet existent but in the making" (Cseh-Varga, Czirak 2018, 2). In essence, Socialist Realism tried to "represent the Communist future with the means of traditional academic painting, combined with photographically or cinematographically inspired imagery" (Groys 2003, 59). Although Socialist Realism had become the official doctrine in the early 1930s, in Latvia, for example, it became the official style only in the late 1940s after Latvia's annexation to the USSR. Those artists who conformed to the doctrine, were supported by the state through the Artists' Union and regularly received offers to carry out commissioned works. In the first decades of the Soviet period, the exhibitions were Sovietized and "collections on display at the state museum were censored, and works found objectionable were banished to the storerooms, replaced by either Socialist Realist exemplars or the traditional realist works freshly confiscated from private collections of Riga's bourgeoisie" (Svede 2002, 191).

The art of the late socialist period in Latvia appears to be creative and experimental as proved by the heterogeneous artistic practices, media, events, etc. However, even if these activities were more or less tolerated by the state authorities, the political and economic control of artistic activity under the Soviet system can still be noticed. For example, those artists, who could be defined as pursuing 'unofficial' art, for example, performance art, were subjected to the mechanisms of oppression imposed by the art



system, since the artists had to survive on the margins of the Soviet system: “Since no art market, no private galleries, no independent curators, and no revues existed that were not state funded, it was impossible to enter the usual channels of promotion” (Erjavec 2003, 21). However, the peripheral position both culturally and geographically was often preferred by the artists: “The freedom of interpretation, the plurality of perspectives and the independence from directives of artistic ideology were the most important motivating factors for underground artists to refuse to participate in centrally managed art production and instead support themselves and their art by taking up private jobs” (Cseh-Varga, Czirak 2018, 7).

Therefore, although, at least in Latvia, there were no instances of openly dissident or political art, the dichotomy between the official and the unofficial art definitely existed (although with certain fluidity). For example, experiments with photography and performance art practices stood further away from the official discourse. These creative practices were not supported by the state cultural institutions and often took place in the cultural and territorial periphery. Due to this outsider’s or art brut position, there was no possibility for the performance discourse to establish itself – no systematic knowledge was accumulated or produced and the information from the West was obtained sporadically and inconsistently. Consequently, it can be argued that performance art belonged to ‘subculture’ or ‘alternative culture’, where even the artists and participants themselves were unsure about the definitions of their activities, often referring to it as ‘partying’, ‘socializing’ and in the best case ‘non-art’. These tendencies and processes must be viewed in parallel with the emergence of youth culture during the 1960s and the alternative developments of the 1970s (Hyperrealism, sporadic outbursts of Conceptualism, experiments in visual arts).

To discuss the period of late socialism in the context of art history, of course, one must take into account the terminology that has been applied to discuss the official art versus the non-official. The usual terms to describe the underground scene are: “Oppositional, dissident, alternative, differently minded, parallel, non-conformist, autonomous or independent”

(Eichwede 2011, 20). In the context of Russian art history it is possible to discuss 'dissident art' as a form of political opposition. However, in the context of Latvian art history the juxtaposition of conformism and non-conformism (or even semi-non-conformism as proposed by several Baltic art historians) has been used to explain the deviant manifestations of art, which were not in accordance of the requirements of the Socialist Realism, but paradoxically managed to exist, as, for example, the so-called Harsh Style, as well as Hyperrealism in painting. These deviances have been explained as mutations of Socialist Realism, as, for example, proposed by Latvian art historian Eduards Kļaviņš. He defines these mutations as the 'Socialist Modernism' and 'Socialist Post-Modernism' (Kļaviņš 2009, 103) and proposes that there are certain artworks created during the late Socialist Realism period, which possess a double code, when "the subject matter chosen by the artist may have been in line with the iconographic typology which was forced onto artists by Socialist Realism [...] at the same time being in line with the artist's subjective orientation toward a world of democratic images" (Kļaviņš 2009, 106). According to Kļaviņš, "the relevant historical and political context helps us to explain this double code, but it does not allow us to differentiate with full certainty between works of art that are clearly in line with political demands and those which are not. This means that the boundaries of 'Socialist Modernism' are frequently indistinct" (Kļaviņš 2009, 106). This double code was often difficult to decipher, because artists tended to use visual metaphors and the so-called Aesopian language. Overall, Socialist Realism as a period in the art discourse in Latvia cannot be regarded as strictly consistent and homogeneous and should rather be viewed as "a simultaneously existing, multi-layered body of stylistic trends" (Bužinska 2010, 26).

### The synthetic construction of *Homo Sovieticus*

As indicated by Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov, "the concept 'New Man' or 'Soviet Man' appeared in the 1920s and 1930s as a postromantic version of the subject of historical changes" (Gudkov 2008, 13). The

socialist society had to be built as an optimistic, classless society by the new human species – *Homo Sovieticus*. This new man was a significant model for mass orientations and identities. He was the carrier of certain values, qualities, and properties, and, accordingly, of a better future. The Soviet ideologues postulated that the man of the future should place the social and public interest first, and should share the aims and principles of the communist ideology by demonstrating his willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of ‘the future of the country’, ‘the Motherland’, ‘the Party’, and the ‘people’. In 1932, Maxim Gorky wrote:

“A new type of person is being created in the Soviet Union, his character traits can be determined with no doubt ... He feels himself as the creator of the new world, his goals depend on his mind and willpower, and therefore he has no reason for pessimism. He is young not only in terms of his biological age, but also historically. He is a power that has just realized his path [of life], his historical significance. He ... is led by a simple and clear doctrine” (Gorky 1953, 289).

In Latvia, too, this ideological plan was implemented, first, from 1940 to 1941 and, later, from the end of World War II until the years of the Soviet occupation until 1991, when state independence was restored. As noted by Latvian art historian Elita Ansonē, socialism and communism were dogmatic systems with their own mythology based on the hierarchy of signs and symbols, for which, similarly to religion, it was very difficult to find affirmation in real life, therefore literature, cinematography and fine arts were regarded as ideal tools to make the Soviet myths, among them the one on a new type of individual, seem believable, fascinating and inspirational (Ansonē 2008, 6-8). The new human type, the positive hero, that the Soviet system was supposed to produce as a result of indoctrination, collectivization, repression and social control had to be healthy, athletic, heterosexual, optimistic, selfless, diligent and patriotic (having a Soviet, rather than a national identity). An article entitled *The New Soviet Man* published in the daily newspaper in Latvia in 1940 praised the New Soviet Man stating that “conscientiousness,

cordiality, excitement and modesty are the main traits that characterize the young Soviet patriots. From their perspective, domesticity, work and heroism are firmly and clearly defined. Each person is included in the collective of all Soviet nations” (Anonymous 1940, 4). The positive hero was also propagandized by Socialist Realism in fine arts, leaving behind numerous portraits of cultural workers, excellent labourers, war veterans, athletes, militiamen and representatives of other professions in public service (Anson 2009, 74).

The positive hero of the Soviet ideology was expected to demonstrate obedience, trust in the superior authorities, discipline, and responsiveness to the commands of the regime. These values were needed to ensure the continuity of the totalitarian regime:

“The qualities of the positive hero could be best explained in terms of the requirements of a totalitarian society, which desires to maximize control over its citizens. Patriotism and Party-mindedness, anti-individualism, [...] acceptance of subordination, unquestioning loyalty to leaders, lack of *genuine* initiative, obedience, adaptability, susceptibility to shame – all these are qualities, which facilitate control over the individual” (Hollander 1983, 49).

Control was also manifested through theatrical and performative means in the public sphere. The public life had to be organized as a constant reminder of the ubiquitous presence of the state and its power. The concept of state was defined through the metaphors of family – ‘fatherland’, ‘motherland’, ‘brotherhood’, ‘sisterhood’; however, it was exercised as a panoptic mechanism of control. The reminders were implemented in a ceremonial and ritualised form, introducing the new Soviet calendar with secularised traditions and building the new Soviet identity on a newly constructed collective memory, whereby military victories and heroes were commemorated and the narrative of ‘friendly occupation’ was built. After all, it was crucial that the state maintained the rituals, since the rituals maintained the state. The duty of the new Soviet man was to express his/her solidarity and passion for collectivism and to participate in mass

demonstrations accompanied by the speeches of political leaders, applause and demonstrations of military capacity. The carnivalesque demonstrations were built in the aesthetics of *Gesamtkunstswerk* or the total work of art (mass spectacles); there were colonnades of gymnasts, flower arrangements, posters, flags, etc. Often, the Soviet space programme and the image of a cosmonaut – the explorer of the Space and a role model of *Homo Sovieticus* – were integrated in the visuals of demonstrations. It was important that the youngest generations participated in the demonstrations, too, in order to reassure society of the continuity of the ideology and political system. The urban environment became a stage for the manifestation of power symbols:

“Symbolic dimension of space is both a power issue and a power instrument: the person who manipulates symbols can also manipulate processes of identification, and thus have influence over the constitution of the group that legitimises the exercise of power” (Monnet 2011).

However, it must be noted that the synthetic construction of *Homo Sovieticus* has not remained constant from the 1920s until today. Moreover, each Socialist Republic must be assessed individually. Gudkov writes that the first attempts to provide evidence of the empirical – rather than the ideological – existence of the individual of a fundamentally different type than the ideologues postulated appeared at the end of the 1950s in Russia (Gudkov 2008: 14). Other interpretations followed in the 1970s and the 1980s offering parodies or transfigurations of the idea of Soviet Man. Important studies on the existence of the Soviet Man as a sociological phenomenon were carried out in the late 1980s under the supervision of Russian sociologist and political scientist Iurii Levada (2003). This contemporary perspective provides a more critical approach to examine the (de)construction of *Homo Sovieticus*.

According to Gudkov, Levada and other contemporary Russian researchers, the Soviet system did shape a new category of human being, but this new human type was not a strong and convincing role model. On the

contrary, it possessed the following features: he was a mass, very average type, someone who had passively adapted to the existing social order by lowering the threshold or his level of needs and demands; *Homo Sovieticus* was the “ordinary” man with (intellectual, ethical and symbolic) limitations, who knew no other models and ways of life, because he had to live under conditions of an isolated and repressed society (Gudkov 2010, 61). *Homo Sovieticus* was not allowed to differ, show initiative or strive for innovation – he was morally and intellectually paralyzed. According to Gudkov, he did not exercise any control over ruling authority or his own leadership, he was a “supervised man” – supervised by the ruling authorities on all levels of life (Gudkov 2010, 52).

### The counterculture of Homo Sovieticus

Riga in the late socialist period was “a mecca for the Soviet youth counterculture” (Svede 2004, 232), which included poets, writers, artists, theatre and film enthusiasts, hippies, etc. They were a “colourful and free-thinking generation, who was in search of new artistic language” (Traumane 2010, 34). To escape the dullness of the regulated and politicised Soviet everyday life, the creative youth gathered in cafes (*Kaza* or Goat being the most famous one), where they could socialize, exchange ideas and discuss the films that they had seen, the music they had listened to and the books that they had read: “Reading saved us from the dull reality behind the door of *Kaza*, [from] the Soviet everyday life – fight for peace, meetings of trade unions, festive demonstrations of 1 May and the October Revolution” (Zvirgzdiņš 2004). Overall, the countercultural youth wanted “distance – spatial, mental, and ideological – from the regime under which they lived” (Fūrst 2017, 3).

For the Soviet counterculture, it was essential to confront the homogenous masses of proletariat, even if it was merely manifested through fashion and provocative looks. For example, Maija Tabaka was a young, emerging artist, who was also known as a free-thinking individual preferring eccentric looks. According to Jānis Borgs, “she could not go

unnoticed” (Borgs 2014: 114) in the dull societal and environmental background. Borgs refers to Tabaka as an “exotic flower” – an exceptionally beautiful and elegant woman wearing “silk dresses and shawls, large hats, expressive make-up and bright red-coloured lips, contrasting with black hair” (Borgs 2014: 114). In the Soviet period, this kind of a dandy-like attitude was a form of a silent protest and identity expressed in an aristocratic lifestyle and appearance to provoke the conservative society (Borgs 2014: 115).

Tabaka herself refers to such performative manifestations as the ‘theatre of life’:

“The dullness of the life in the 1960s was unbelievable. The streets of Riga were dominated by the insanity of standardization. I wanted to stand out. [...] Once I wanted to provoke the people on the streets, I put on my Redington coat and a bowler hat from the 1920s [...] and walked down the former Lenin Street [...]. Everyone looked back at me, and that was the friendliest attitude. The reaction of many people was shockingly hostile: I was verbally abused, men whistled, others run after me, some spat on me. [...] The normal society could not stand those, who were different. [...] They allegedly embodied something Western, thus threatening the homogenously faultless society. [...] It can be said that it was the theatre of life” (Blaua 2010, 49).

Due to the extravagant non-Soviet looks and a free-thinking mindset, as well as overly Western features in her artwork, Tabaka was excluded from the State Art Academy of the Latvian SSR in 1961. According to Lancmanis, “her work *Pineapple Eaters* had annoyed instructors not just by the subject and unusually bright colouring but, first of all, by the mood created by the bizarre characters” (Lancmanis 2004, 107). This style echoed with the Surrealists and was not acceptable to the Soviet ideologues and censors.

Another artist Andris Grinbergs, who was the pioneer of performance art in Latvia, championed individualism and eccentricity, for example, by strolling on the most central street in Riga dressed in the clothes that he

had designed. As Grinbergs notes: “Brīvības Street used to be a promenade – people would go there to show themselves and observe others. In the evenings, I would go by tram to the marketplace on Matīsa Street, walk down to the Laima clock, stroll around for some time and return home, because there was nothing else to do” (Grinbergs 2011, 250). This assertion also speaks of the paralysed creative agency in the Soviet political and economic system. Unable to express innovation and creativity within the dogmatic canon of Socialist Realism, the creative youth sought ways to express themselves further away from the official domain. Moreover, “there was nothing else to do” echoes with the futility of Soviet life, the sense of uselessness when whatever one does has no practical result.

If such provocative everyday manifestations might seem trivial and unimportant from today’s point of view, in Riga in the period of late socialism it required a certain degree of courage to exhibit these manifestations of Western culture and to differ from the mainstream proletarian population (alas *Homo Sovieticus*) due to the involved risk of being arrested: “The strolls along Brīvības Street looked like this: you would get to the city centre, change clothes in the getaway, stride for a while and off you would go. It wasn’t like you could loiter all day long – the militia could arrest you, someone might not have liked your long hair” (Grinbergs 2011, 251). As indicated by Latvian art historian Māra Traumane, “these poetic games of dressing, undressing, [and] strolling [...] acquire importance because through them the body and clothing transformed into a ‘battlefield’ between individual freedoms and social norms” (Traumane 2010, 35). Moreover, such a ‘masquerade’ was a sign of immunity against Soviet values and indoctrination of such values, so this everyday performance can be seen as a political gesture.

However, creativity and improvisation later became the trademarks of Grinbergs’s art. At the end of the 1960s, when the hippie movement started to emerge in Latvia, Grinbergs became the flagman of this socially quite bullied subculture, which was often viewed – especially in Soviet press – with hostility as “a crowd of backsliders and parasites, infecting our crystal-clear society with a foreign ideology” (Borgs 1989, 9-10). Though



Grinbergs is often cited as the leader of the hippie group in Riga, he denies it, saying that he was “just a visual rendition” and what mattered more to him than, for example, the hippie ideology, was the excitement about clothes and an opportunity to dress his friends (Grinbergs 2011, 254). The motto ‘life is a fashion show’ remained crucial to Grinbergs as a performance artist, too: “I dressed my models and created an environment, where they could express themselves and which could to some degree ‘rip’ them out of their masks, turn them into live human beings, containing more than you see on an everyday basis” (Grinbergs 1992, 2). By “masks” Grinbergs refers to the double life phenomenon in the Soviet period, which was based on pretence and artificially constructed identities of *Homo Sovieticus*. These masks had to be worn on an everyday basis in the official domain – whether at one’s workplace, university, school or other institutionalised spaces. With the help of alternative counterculture there was an opportunity to lead a more authentic lifestyle, unbiased and non-regulated by ideology.

The hippie movement in Latvia existed – at least in the beginning – without any canons or ideology, and as it is stated by the former members of this subculture: “There was curiosity and joy about this opportunity – to live one’s life differently. An opportunity to wear flamboyant clothes, walk barefoot in the streets of the city, gather at the Dome Square, sing *All you need is love*” (Borgs 1989, 9-10). The ideas that were interwoven in the hippie subculture in the West and mainly in the USA, such as sexual liberation and opposition to nuclear weapons, resonated with the hippie movement in Soviet Latvia, too. For example, Grinbergs in one of the interviews in 1992 admits that “at that time there were all those instabilities with the atomic bomb, and it seemed that you lived for one day, perhaps there was no tomorrow and you had to live to the maximum” (Grinbergs 1992, 2). Whereas in regard to sexual revolution Grinbergs states that nudity was a form of protest against the prevailing puritanical attitudes: “Sexual revolution wasn’t only self-gratification. Its essence was manifested in the protest against the system, when you didn’t belong to yourself, all your thoughts were regulated, and the only [thing] that you

had was your body – you could do with it anything that you wanted” (Grinbergs 1999, 22–23). When one experiences a situation of “controlled thoughts”, it means that through constant indoctrination and other Sovietisation instruments a person has internalised Soviet values and is disconnected from his/her authentic self. In psychotherapy, such a disconnection is often seen as trauma. To a certain degree, Soviet experience was traumatic at many levels, but especially in terms of leading a fake, untrue, and unauthentic life based on lies, pretence and manipulation.

### Performance art as alternative and non-official art

It can be stated that performance art in Latvia developed through the anthropocentric Hippie movement. First of all, because Grinbergs was a participant of the Hippie movement, and, second, because the Hippie aesthetics celebrated through nudity and awareness of non-suppressed sexuality, liberalisation and harmony of nature was manifested in several performance pieces of Grinbergs. Of course, performance art was not in any way institutionalised or officially acknowledged discipline. It could not be studied at the Art Academy or any other educational establishment, and it lacked any visibility, since it was only implemented in small networks and microenvironments of friends, acquaintances and family members. There was no knowledge or understanding of this discipline gained through studying or contributing to a discourse, and it was practiced rather intuitively – as a form of ‘being’ or ‘lifestyle’. Performance artists and practitioners did not object to their marginal position in the cultural and geographical periphery, since it allowed them more freedom in experimentation and an opportunity to create depoliticised and uncensored art. To draw some parallels, it is intriguing that, for example, pantomime (see Fig. No 1), which was very close to performance art as a performative art based on non-verbal communication, was supported by the state ideologues as a form of “Soviet Esperanto” (Iliev 2014, 219).



*Fig. No 1.* Riga Pantomime (1964–1965). Photographer: Zenta Dzividzinska (1944–2011); available on: <https://dom.lndb.lv/data/obj/86420.html>

One of the performances where the Hippie aesthetics can be noticed in Grinbergs's oeuvre is *The Green Wedding* (1973; with the alternative title *Summertime*). It was not the first performance piece by Grinbergs, yet it is a useful example to examine artistic strategies applied by artists in the cultural and geographical periphery to reflect – even if intuitively – on the (dis)balance between the private and public domains. The performance piece was entitled *The Green Wedding*, since the green colour was the leading motif: there were green clothes for Grinbergs and his wife, and a green cab that took them from the Old Riga to the greenery in the countryside. This performance piece started as a post-nuptial procession through the streets of Old Riga following the official wedding ceremony of the Grinbergs couple at the State Registry Office (see Fig. No 2) and ended in the countryside where the panoptic sight of the KGB could be avoided (see Fig. No 3). As Grinbergs states, the setting of this happening was “very romantic and hippie – the horses, swings, grass wreaths, naked bodies” (Grinbergs 2011: 255). Nudity, a self-evident norm and a form of

Fig. No 2. Andris Grinbergs. The Green Wedding (alternative title Summertime; 1973). Photographer: Jānis Kreicbergs. Available on: <https://dom.lndb.lv/data/obj/89253.html>



liberation was a prominent element of creation, too, since the totalitarian body of *Homo Sovieticus* needed to be freed from all the restrictions and ideological burdens. To Grinbergs, the body was “the only zone of freedom” (Grinbergs 2011: 257).

However, not only the Hippie aesthetics and philosophy were manifested in this performance piece, but also blurred boundaries between art and life, as well as the official and non-official. By integrating an event of private life – a wedding ceremony – in the work of art, Grinbergs artistically deformed Soviet reality, because wedding ceremonies in Soviet social life could only be implemented in the state-controlled sphere and institutions. Also, by improvising the celebration and carrying it out as a performance piece, as well as expanding the boundaries of the private event to the realm of art, Grinbergs raised the question of ‘doubleness’, which can be interpreted as dichotomy of the public versus the real or the authentic. In Grinbergs’s case, it could be the role of an obedient and conformist Soviet citizen – *Homo Sovieticus*, on the one hand, and the role of a



*Fig. No 3.* Andris Grinbergs. The Green Wedding (alternative title Summertime; 1973). Photographer: Jānis Kreicbergs. Available on: <https://dom.lndb.lv/data/obj/89254.html>

non-conformist artist expressing himself in performance art, on the other. In one of the interviews Grinbergs also mentions this dramatic aspect of doubleness in his life and art: “Of course, I have often thought that the entire life is a theatre and all that we get depends on how good we play our roles. Where is that place where one can be real? This double life continues endlessly” (Grinbergs 1992, 2).

It can be suggested that for Grinbergs the cultural and geographical periphery provided a certain asylum, which allowed him to avoid the distortion of his personality and identity, or even suffer legal consequences for not meeting the ideals of *Homo Sovieticus*. Performance art provided time and space, where Grinbergs could feel ‘authentic’ and ‘autonomous’ as an artist. He has repeatedly emphasised that he has always preferred the life of an outsider as opposed to being part of the Soviet art system, creating commissioned and conformist artwork and exhibiting it in the official museum or gallery space. This strategy also helped him to avoid the internalization of Soviet values, which were epitomised by the ideological construction of *Homo Sovieticus*.

## Conclusions

The existence of countercultures and art disciplines that did not correspond to the Soviet ideals or instruments of Sovietisation signifies that there was an opportunity to create an alternative reality – a microenvironment, where it was possible to exercise more democratic and horizontal forms of collectivism. Indeed, members of countercultures and alternative art disciplines could create small islands of freedom – networks – not permeated by ideology and censorship. These efforts can be seen as attempts to create depoliticised and participatory art, free of ideological dogmas or political counter-arguments. In this microenvironment democratic principles of freedom of expression, participation, initiative and non-hierarchical work relationships were implemented, thus demonstrating how community and selfhood could be exercised under the restrictions of a totalitarian regime.

Consequently, it can be concluded that the totalitarian regime was unsuccessful in creating fully obedient human beings with a paralysed creative and intellectual agency – *Homo Sovieticus*. On the contrary, the political regime was even stimulating the creativity of artists, since they had to find innovative artistic strategies to be able to coexist along the official culture. Undeniably, these strategies were partly subjected to the mechanism of fear (and survival) imposed by the totalitarian regime and, thus, are historically, socially and politically specific. Yet, paradoxically, it also shows that the regime was unable to silence the creative expression, individualism and initiative.

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## EXPLANATIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUPERSTITION, MAGICAL THINKING, AND OCCULTISM IN THE PRESS OF SOVIET LATVIA

*This article offers a thematic analysis of Latvian-writing press published in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic in the period 1945–1989 with the aim to identify explanations and attitudes towards 'superstition', 'magical thinking' and 'occultism'. The most occurring examples of superstition were categorized in seven themes: magical thinking as the prime origin of religion; superstition as a primitive way of explaining natural phenomena; mediumship and spirit summoning; quackery or health fraud; divination or fortune telling; 'everyday superstitions'; rituals and superstitions of individual professional groups. The thematic analysis suggests that although media in Soviet Latvia were the messengers of the communist ideology and advocates of a scientific and materialistic worldview, over time, some expressions of magical thinking were treated less strictly than others, e.g., in sport. In general, any belief in supernatural powers was considered as reactionary and obscurantist and attributed as characteristic to Western capitalist societies.*

*Keywords: Soviet Latvian press, superstition, magical thinking, occultism, explanations, attitudes*

### Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore what attitudes and explanations of superstition, magical thinking and occultism existed in the press of Soviet Latvia in the period 1945–1989. Since the Soviet Union was pursuing materialistic and atheist worldview as the cornerstone of the progress of

its socio-economic system, occultism, superstition and magical thinking were seen not only backward but also as potentially dangerous in the process of building a modern communist society. The danger from believing in supernatural powers and pre-destined fate instead of individual and collective agency or practicing magic rituals and folk healing instead of turning for help to the modern medicine would not only corrupt the political ideology of the Soviet state but also compromise the morals and potentially the health and ability to work of regular soviet citizens. The Soviet Union portrayed itself as a state of scientific achievements and materialistic worldview which was juxtaposed with the 'rotten' and 'obscurant' capitalist West, which was depicted as regressing due to beliefs in religion or superstitions that were exploited by the elites to restrain the working class from fighting for their rights. Mass media served as "one of the most calibrated weapons" in the political rivalry between the Soviet Union and capitalist countries (Fainberg 2012), and no opportunity was missed to ridicule or prove wrong the shortcomings of the opponent societies also in terms of their belief systems or spiritual practices. At the same time, the superstitions were not only the problem of the West but seemingly still occurring among various segments of the soviet people. For example, a post-war American article *The Exploitation of Superstitions for Purposes of Psychological Warfare* (Hungerford 1950) discusses the possible ways how to use superstitions in a possible conflict with the Soviet Union, exposing the war and post-war magical beliefs of several nationalities. The article also suggests that it is hard to evaluate how widespread the belief in the superstitions is in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, but Western reporters have observed magical beliefs and rituals practiced in the Soviet Union and there have been articles in the Soviet press pointing out the shortcomings in its own society, which leads to think that Soviet leaders are aware of this problem.

However, this research is focused on the press materials that were published in Latvian language in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic between 1945 and 1989, which was the period of the second occupation

of Latvia by the Soviet Union. There was no free press in this period as it was under a strict control and censorship from the Communist Party, and it served as the messenger of the communist ideology. This article will reveal the frequency of the usage of the keywords 'occultism', 'superstition' and 'magic' in the press of Soviet Latvia and offer some categories of how the explanations and interpretations of these phenomena could be classified according to the way they were depicted in the printed press of Soviet Latvia.

## Theoretical background

### Definitions of occultism, magic and superstition in the Soviet Union

To identify how the phenomena of 'occultism', 'magic' and 'superstition' were defined by the official ideology and science in the Soviet period, this section of the article will include some of the definitions that were found in the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* (Bol'shaja Sovetskaja Enciklopedija).

**Occultism** (from Latin *occultus* – secret, inmost) is defined as – “the general term of teachings that recognize the existence of hidden forces in man and space, inaccessible to ordinary human experience, but available to ‘initiates’ who have gone through a special *initiation* and special mental workout” (Bol'shaja Sovetskaja Enciklopedija 1969/1978). Those who have been initiated in the occult, have “an open access to the so-called ‘secret knowledge’ – the influence or control over the hidden forces of nature and man” (ibid.), and the followers of this thinking are “considering the world as a kind of spiritualized organism in which all forces are in constant dynamic interaction” (ibid.). It is also said that the content and understanding of the occult has changed over the centuries with gradual expansion of science and its ability to explain more and more previously mysterious phenomena such as magnetism, gravity or hypnotism. The definition goes on explaining the opposition of science and occult saying

that “the antagonism of occultism and science is also associated with the fact that the occult is based on an undivided and irrational type of thinking that goes back to the ancient animism and magic, which does not allow the separation of the objective and subjective spheres” (ibid.). In the end, the occult practices of the mid-20th century in Western countries are described as entering the realm of mass commercialisation where magicians and astrologists are acting as entrepreneurs. The rise of the popularity of all kinds of occultism in the West is explained as reaction to the “general crisis of the present bourgeois culture” (ibid.) and the development of occultism is characteristic to periods of social and cultural crises.

**Magic** (from Latin *magia*, from Greek *mageia*) is described as “witchcraft, sorcery, magic, rituals associated with belief in a person’s ability to influence people, animals, natural phenomena, as well as imaginary spirits and gods in a supernatural way” (ibid.). Magic evolved in the most ancient era when the powers of nature overwhelmed humans and it is seen as inherent to primitive religions but in the class society magic recedes into the background of more complex forms of religion. However, magic is preserved as an important component of many rituals of any religion, including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam etc., such as chrismation, pilgrimages to holy healing springs or prayer services for rain, blessings to harvest etc. The definition also suggests that there exists a division of magic into black (appeal to evil spirits) and white (appeal to pure spirits – angels, saints). Magic, similarly to occultism, was described as an ancient ‘secret science’ which has been disproven by the modern science.

**Superstition** was not included as a separate entry in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia; however, it is possible to find it in the Atheistic Dictionary (Ateisticheskij slovar’). There it is defined as “a prejudice through which many occurrences seem to be manifestations of supernatural powers or omens” (Ateisticheskij slovar’ 1983). It is said that ministers of different religions often claim that any other beliefs which do not belong to their church are superstitions; however, in essence, any belief of supernatural power falls into the category of superstition and religion has a common origin with the so called ‘everyday superstition’ such as belief in omens,

prophetic dreams, fortune telling. Superstitions have emerged from ancient humans who trusted in them as means to fight the forces of nature; however, existence of superstitions in the present conditions often lead people to religion and it is essential to overcome such prejudices with the rise of culture and education.

Soviet dictionaries and encyclopaedias can be considered as officially approved sources of information that would provide ideologically legitimate definitions, which could later be used by specialists and journalists to provide explanations of different phenomena in a unified manner to general public.

### Press in Soviet Latvia

Although the printed press predominated the media environment of Soviet Latvia, it must be said that the number and thematic scope of periodicals, issued at different periods in Soviet Latvia, varied. The media space of the post-war USSR was characterised by a radical centralisation of mass media that forced all the media to mimic the press of Moscow and use the unified news service. The Soviet Republics could somewhat adjust the centralized press models to their own specifics, but the censorship was still strong (Pavlovičs 2010). The press was a recognized tool for spreading propaganda and channelling the desirable social changes expected to occur in all the countries of the new communist state.

Only in the period after Stalin's death and with the emergence of national communism, functions of the mass media changed, and they started to consider the opinions of their readers and became more enjoyable and entertaining. There was a short period between 1956 and 1958 when the decision of the Central Committee of the CPSU of November 10, 1954, *On errors in atheistic propaganda*, was put in practice, which declared religion and, indirectly, many other Marxist-neutral ideas as politically acceptable as long as they were separated from state ideology (Pavlovičs 2010, 99). However, with a new atheism campaign in 1958, the relative moment of tolerance in the press ended. According to Pavlovičs

(ibid.), 1957 was also the year when Soviet press was standing in crossroads not knowing what exactly was allowed and what was prohibited from publishing, and that created a base for relative freedom of action in the central press of Latvian national communists.

Some of the newspapers and magazines existed from the early days of the Soviet period, while others, also dedicated to particular professions, appeared later. The main periodicals in Soviet Latvia published in Latvian were the communist party's newspaper *Cīņa* [Fight], the pedagogically didactic newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* [Soviet Youth], a newspaper devoted to literature – *Literatūra un Māksla* [Literature and Art]. Small local newspapers were also crucial. They were published in the regions and cities of Latvia, for example, *Rīgas Balsis* [Voice of Riga]. Some of the main magazines were *Zvaigzne* [Star], *Liesma* [Flame], *Karogs* [Flag], *Kino* [Film], *Zinātne un Tehnika* [Science and Technology] and the satirical journal *Dadzis* [Thistle] (Bicēna 2017). It was also possible to subscribe to periodicals of the other socialist bloc countries.

### The research method

To identify what explanations and attitudes towards superstitions, occultism and magical thinking dominated in Soviet Latvian press, content analysis of Soviet press materials available at the online database Periodika.lv [Periodicals.lv] was carried out. The aim was to identify the frequency of occurrence of the keywords 'occultism', 'superstition' and 'magic'. This was followed by a thematic analysis of the published materials to identify how Soviet Latvian press explained and interpreted these phenomena.

The keywords were entered in the online database Periodika.lv, and the found results were filtered by the pre-defined automatic listing 'Periodicals of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic'. The relevant articles for analysis were selected from years 1945 to 1989. The materials in 1945 were chosen starting from the 9th May when World War II had ended, and Latvia was incorporated in the USSR. The 1989 was the last year included

in this analysis, since the 1990 is considered a year when Latvia started its separation from the Soviet Union.

The limitation to this approach of data gathering is that the collected data are only in Latvian language due to their availability in the given database and the language proficiency of the researcher. It must be noted that during the Soviet period, Russian was the language of interethnic communication, and many all-union periodicals were distributed to all Soviet Republics including Latvia and several local periodicals were also published in Russian language (Dimants & Rožukalne 2021). This research reflects only the attitudes and explanations provided for the speakers of Latvian language although the composition of the population was not uniform and at its lowest point in 1989, Latvians constituted only 52% of all the population (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde 2021).

Another technical limitation is that the selection of data from the database Periodika.lv was subjected to the algorithms that exist in this online site with its own search engine and filters. To narrow down the search to the periodicals that were printed in the Soviet period, the pre-defined listing 'Periodicals of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic' was chosen as a filter. Unfortunately, the database Periodika.lv does not provide a list of periodicals they include in this filter. For example, satirical magazines had their own listing, even though they were also published in the Soviet period. However, they were omitted from this analysis as they represent a genre of entertainment, and this analysis was targeted to more serious publications.

## Results and analysis

### Frequency of the keywords in Soviet Latvian periodicals

These results present an overview of the total count of articles that feature keywords 'occultism', 'magic' and 'superstition' in the periodicals published from 09.05.1945 to 31.12.1989 and are available in the digital database Periodika.lv under the listing 'Periodicals of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic'.



Keyword 'Occultism'  
Total count (n = 31)

Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count
1945 (from 09.05)		1950	1	1960		1970	1	1980	
1946		1951		1961		1971	3	1981	
1947	1	1952		1962		1972	2	1982	
1948		1953		1963		1973		1983	
1949		1954	3	1964		1974	3	1984	1
		1955		1965		1975		1985	4
		1956		1966	1	1976	1	1986	2
		1957		1967	1	1977		1987	
		1958	1	1968		1978		1988	3
		1959		1969		1979		1989	3
Total count per decade	1		5		2		10		13

The term 'occultism' seems to be used quite rarely in the periodicals of Soviet Latvia. In the last two decades of the Soviet rule, this term appeared most often, respectively, in the 1970s – 10 times, in the 1980s – 13 times. Over the whole period, this word appears 31 time in the printed press.

Keyword 'Magic'  
Total count (n=486)

Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count
1945 (from 09.05)	1	1950	0	1960	6	1970	15	1980	14
1946	2	1951	2	1961	5	1971	11	1981	19
1947	6	1952	2	1962	7	1972	7	1982	23
1948	2	1953	1	1963	5	1973	9	1983	27
1949	7	1954	3	1964	6	1974	19	1984	25
		1955	3	1965	8	1975	3	1985	18
		1956	4	1966	17	1976	16	1986	31
		1957	2	1967	6	1977	10	1987	28
		1958	1	1968	11	1978	20	1988	31
		1959	0	1969	6	1979	21	1989	26
Total count per decade	18		18		77		131		242

The keyword 'magic' can be observed more than "occultism" in the Soviet press of Latvia and its occurrence increases by every decade. Overall, this word appeared 486 times in the printed articles. The tendency of the usage of this term seems to increase rapidly in the last two decades of the Soviet Union.

Keyword 'Superstition'  
Total (n=932)

Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count
1945	14	1950	23	1960	23	1970	20	1980	9
1946	14	1951	21	1961	33	1971	17	1981	16
1947	23	1952	20	1962	15	1972	12	1982	17
1948	39	1953	24	1963	21	1973	10	1983	19
1949	35	1954	37	1964	30	1974	18	1984	23
		1955	25	1965	16	1975	21	1985	16
		1956	28	1966	27	1976	18	1986	14
		1957	18	1967	16	1977	16	1987	13
		1958	36	1968	11	1978	23	1988	12
		1959	31	1969	17	1979	19	1989	22
Total count per decade	125		263		209		174		161

The keyword 'superstition' has quite a different tendency in terms of the frequency of occurrence in Soviet periodicals in Latvia in comparison to the keywords 'occultism' and 'magic'. It tends to decline from decade to decade, reaching the lowest point of occurrence in the 1980s.

Although it is hard to draw any concrete conclusions from the frequency of the keyword occurrence in terms of the attitudes of Soviet Latvian press towards these phenomena, some ideas could be suggested why there are such differences over the decades.

The main assumptions would be that during the Stalinist period, the anti-religion propaganda was one of the main driving forces for changing the belief system of people who had a different socio-economic and political system before World War II such as the case of Latvia. The word

'superstition' mostly appeared as a part of the phrase 'religion and superstition' or 'religious superstition' and thus it was quite prominent in the militant atheist propaganda published in the press. In the following decades, the frequency of occurrence of the term 'superstition' decreased.

Another observation of the published materials indicates that quite a large number of publications consisted of literary works – novels, stories, plays and poetry. Much of that also included didactic teachings or allusions of the harms of practicing everyday magic and occult deeds; however, in later decades of the Soviet period the artistic means of expression were less sterile, and writers used the words 'magic', 'superstition' in figurative speech on more occasions.

'Occultism' is quite a specific term that cannot be used too much in figurative speech, therefore when it was used, mostly it referred to describing the real occult practices. The increase of the appearance of this term in the 1970s, seems to relate to the major movement of the New Age in Western countries which had some repercussions in the socialist bloc too, and the official media had to react to these tendencies to guide the minds of the Soviet people back to the communist values.

### The main thematic groups of explanations and attitudes of Soviet Latvian press towards superstition, magical thinking and occultism

The thematic analysis of the selected articles published in the press of Soviet Latvia suggest several categories and directions how the supernatural phenomena such as superstition, occultism and magic was perceived and explained to the general public. The most occurring themes could be divided in seven categories: (1) Magical thinking as the prime origin of religion; (2) Superstition as a primitive way of explaining natural phenomena; (3) Mediumship and spirit summoning seances, e.g. table turning, Ouija boards; (4) Quackery or health fraud, such as practices of witch doctors, casting on spells, folk healing; (5) Divination or fortune telling, e.g. astrology, chiromancy, palmistry, cartomancy;

(6) 'Everyday superstitions', such as believing in good/bad signs bringing good/bad luck; (7) Rituals and superstitions of individual professional groups.

### Magical thinking as the prime origin of religion

The press of Soviet Latvia propagated atheism and materialistic worldview that is based in the discoveries of Soviet science as the only correct mindset of the Soviet people. The central argument of many articles is that superstition is inseparable from religion and intrinsic to it since both are based on the belief in supernatural powers that can influence events in the world and human lives (Padomju Jaunatne 1949). Religion in the published materials was seen as characteristic to capitalist societies thereby reactionary and not based on any scientific proofs. Religion was seen as a tool that the upper class has been using for centuries to exploit the working class by obscuring their minds and convincing them that their struggle, oppression and pain in the 'physical world' would be compensated in the 'afterlife'. Some articles used quite an aggressive tone and means of expressions inspired by military vocabulary in their agitation to get rid of the outdated mindset of the bourgeois society, such as "materialistic teachings of I. Pavlov lethally struck all the idealistic and religious notions of soul as a substance that is separate from the body" (Vēriņš 1954a) or "speaking in the language of soldiers – one should count direct hits instead of fired cartridge-shells" (Paparde 1965) in the fight to turn people to atheism. Very often Soviet press equates 'religion and superstition' and explains the emergence of 'religious superstition' as deriving from the primeval humans who engaged with magic, sorcery and various cults and rituals to explain the unknown and complex natural world. The next stage associated with the expansion of magic is said to relate to the medieval Catholic church and its engagement in occult practices (Vēriņš 1954b). Also, the capitalist world is described as supportive for various magical practices, and accused of using the language of science to 'prove' the causal effects of magic, e.g. "the bourgeois researchers 'scientifically' divide magic as 'white' and 'black', 'active' and 'passive'" (ibid.).



Figure 1. Cartoon *Kapitalistiskajā Amerikā: diplomēta tumsonība; melnā maģija un buršana* [In Capitalist America: Certified Obscurantism; Black Magic and Sorcery.] Published in the journal *Zvaigzne* [Star], No 20, 15.10.1951.

Overall, the connection of magic and religion have been prevalent in the majority of explanations of both phenomena, and such expressions as “magic is religion’s sister” (Cīņa 1954), “there are no principal differences between superstition and religion” (Bajevs & Šišakovs 1947) or “superstition is a religion that has gone out of fashion, while religion has become a superstition in fashion” (Kecers 1956; Bušmanis 1974) illustrate the joint attempts to eliminate both. Although religion is often addressed on its own, in many articles magic and superstition have also other meanings and forms of practices which are seen as similarly unnatural to Soviet people. Some of them will be described in the following sections.

#### Superstition as a primitive way of explaining natural phenomena

Aside the spiritual and magical thinking which were seen as false according to the Soviet ideology, one aspect where some concessions were made in terms of being true or somewhat true, were the attitudes of explanations of some natural phenomena. For example, when speaking about how the primitive superstitions arose, some articles tend to justify the folk beliefs of predicting the weather or the knowledge of some healing qualities of herbs. It is explained that humans have observed the nature for hundreds of years and collected a prominent number of identifying features from what they could predict the weather forecast or suitable time for land cultivation and sowing (Gubanovs 1957; Drujanovs 1960). Similarly legitimate seems the knowledge accumulated by collecting plants for nutrition or medical treatment (Sergejevs 1945). However,

historical societies and those who still practice some sort of superstitions about the natural phenomena which are known to the modern science are considered as primitive and savage. Some articles, especially in the post-war years tend to educate readers about basic natural phenomena which their ancestors have explained through the lens of superstition – such as appearance of comets or eclipse of the Sun and the Moon (Leja 1945). Soviet scientists have been involved in working out explanations of everyday puzzles and unexplainable issues, and their achievements were proudly displayed in the press, such as finding scientific grounds of why some agricultural species transform into others (Avotiņš-Pavlovs 1952). Some articles which are aimed at teaching atheistic worldview to children include information about how to explain the natural phenomena such as thunder, lightning, stars etc., as otherwise children with their little experience and lack of knowledge are susceptible to fantastic, unscientific beliefs (Melkšāne, 1959). Science was said to be able to ‘predict’ the future by applying empirical and progressive experimental methods in a more effective way and instead of reading and engaging with mystical literature, it is recommended to read “valuable science fiction which teaches of the upcoming scientific discoveries and transformations of our planet” (Lediņš 1966).

### Mediumship and spirit summoning seances

Seemingly one of the occurring interests in the occult practices in the Soviet society was spirit summoning seances or talking to the dead through such methods of Spiritism as table turning or moving the Ouija board. This seemed to be quite popular also among teenagers who engaged in this activity out of curiosity and for fun. It required a strong counteraction from the authorities and a vigilance from the Communist Youth organisation, striving for the transformation of the youngsters’ minds towards the scientific and materialistic worldview and mass media was used for this purpose. For example, several commentaries are written to answer letters from readers who ask such questions as “What is magic?”

(Vēriņš 1954b), “What is the opinion of science about calling upon spirits?” (Padomju Jaunatne 1948) or even more detailed descriptions of the problems the young communists encounter with their schoolmates. The newspaper *Soviet Youth* (Padomju Jaunatne 1950) published a question from the Communist Youth Organisation members of the Rūjiena Secondary School in the rubric *Youth asks us – we answer*. They complained that some of the schoolgirls practice the seances with the Ouija board and the members of the organisation need some advice how to convince the girls that spirits do not exist and help them get rid of the fetters of superstition. The newspaper responds with a quotation from Friedrich Engels who says that spiritualism is the “most pointless from all the superstitions” and illustrates this with depictions of Western societies where this obscurantism has not only become widely popular but also supported by the ruling classes. They claim that the capitalist world has an interest in running spiritualism as a business since they can earn quite a lot of money from ignorant people, plus it serves as a tool in their arsenal to blur the consciousness of the working class and restrain them from the fight against the capitalist exploitation. The article also draws attention to the close connection of the modern spiritualism and religion which teaches about the ‘eternal life’ and they both are exposed as false and ridiculous by the progressive science – Marxism-Leninism. The article goes on saying that the socialist state has exterminated the exploiter class and therefore also the circumstances that facilitated all sorts of superstitions. The ways how the communist youth should fight this ignorance among their peers is based on spreading the scientific knowledge of human anatomy and physiology, physics and Darwinism. This article also turns the youth against their teachers saying that if the teachers fail to connect the knowledge with the real-life experiences and do not tend to condemn the ‘reactionary ideology’, it is then the obligation of the Communist Youth Organisation to eliminate the gap between the theory and practice.



## Quackery and health fraud

Another theme that reappeared over the decades and apparently was practiced in the society, was folk healing or in other occasions – health fraud. The attitude towards people who turned for medical help to quackers, witch-doctors or folk healers was condemnatory, mostly calling them uneducated, uncultured or simply gullible and credulous while the practitioners were depicted as fraudsters, deceivers and wrongdoers. However, some grain of truth was said to exist in the folk knowledge of herbal potencies but only in line with approval of modern scientific findings. Other folk healing methods like charms, spells or use of medically unapproved substances were strongly combatted. Articles often warned readers of harms that folk healers could cause by delaying patients from getting professional medical help in time. At the same time, while praising the advanced and accessible medical system of Soviet Latvia, one doctor explains that folk healers sometimes might be more sympathetic to the help-seekers than physicians, who often do not have the time to listen, explain and comfort their patient. People often turn to charlatans because of insecurity and fear for their health, and in order to regain patients' trust, doctors must be more caring and sympathetic to the patients (Čakste 1959). Some articles tend to publicly shame concrete healers and their clients or mention regions in Latvia where people are more prone to seeking help from folk healers. The press illustrates their methods with the most repulsive examples, e.g. there are inhabitants of Daugavpils, Ilūkste and Dagda districts who in case of illness turn to charlatans who in turn suggest them to brew tea from the sick person's shirt or boil a broth from different sorts of garbage (Vēriņš 1954b). Witch-doctors are also criticised for not trusting their own 'skills' and seeking medical assistance in hospitals when they are in need (Mazarovs 1969).

Several articles draw attention to the connection of religion and charlatanism, whose followers tend to believe in unworldly forces that can 'help' people with their troubles, only if the 'right' words are used such as in spells, prayers, or rituals (Tokarevs 1949). Religious and magical



Figure 2. Cartoon accompanying the article *Lētticīgu ļautiņu maižē* [Living off the gullible people]. Author M. Veisbergs. Published in the newspaper *Cīņa* [Fight], No 15, 17.01.1969.

thinking are considered to be interlinked and similarly harmful since they can dissuade a person from seeking medical assistance in a timely manner and any disease that is lingering becomes harder to cure (Oļeščuks 1950).

There are also publications that are more concerned with the health and productivity of the Soviet workforce rather than with their beliefs. For example, a commentary from 1974 written by a medical professional suggests that although lately there has been less need to educate society about the problems of folk healing, incoming letters from readers make the doctors wary. The author suggests that while there existed rational approaches in the folk healing such as knowledge about herbs, minerals or substances from animal origin, they have been mixed with irrational beliefs of treating illness as an evil spirit or demon which has to be driven out by spells, shamanic rituals and disgusting substances from the “manure pharmacy” (Ārons 1974). Any kind of self-diagnosing and healing can lead to prolonged illness while it is declared by the state that each citizen is obliged to actively protect their health so they would not lose their working capacity and become a burden to the state and fellow citizens.

## Divination and future telling

According to the opinions expressed in the press, Soviet people are not supposed to believe in supernatural forces because then they lose the trust in science which enables humans to be the most powerful creatures on the planet. Divination and future telling relate to the belief in the pre-destined future and fate what make people passive and limit their endeavours to build their own life. The Marxist-Leninist teachings are used to explain that society has its own natural laws and the Great October Socialist Revolution proved for the first time in the human history that people can become rulers of their own 'destiny' (Padomju Jauņatne 1953).

Divination and future telling have been broadly referred to as frauds that are widespread in the capitalistic societies. Many articles especially highlight the predominance of beliefs in divination and mysticism in the USA, France, Germany, Italy and other Western countries. They provide examples how 'witchcraft' and 'fortune teller' courses and schools exist in these countries and what profits their businessmen make with fraudulent selling of divination cards, crystal balls, books, records with audio lectures and even fortune-telling machines (Meļuchins 1955; Padomju Jaunatne 1971). Some articles also expose the gullible nature of many top businessmen and state leaders who employ astrologists to look into horoscopes to predict lucky days for making deals or outcomes of stock markets (Meļuchins 1955).

Such practitioners as astrologists, chiromancers, clairvoyants and future-tellers are referred to as obscurantists, reactionaries and hoaxers who stupefy and trick thousands of people. Beliefs in magical thinking and superstition are seen as remains from medieval darkness and backwardness which is harmful in the progress of educating the communist working-class people about the natural laws of the world (Vēriņš 1954b). Educational and medical explanations are also provided in articles that deal with some sort of bodily experiences that are not fully clear to people, such as dreaming. Interpretation of dreams is also seen as a type of myth

that has to be debunked. One article explains the functions of human brain responsible for creating dreams and offers medical counterarguments to believing in dream interpretation (Krutjiks 1961).

Some articles expose local fortune tellers' names for public derision. An article from 1957 condemns and ridicules a man from Lizums who is described as self-claimed "charlatan, miracle doctor and clairvoyant" but who in fact is a simple deceiver that cheated several people with predicting their future with a centrifuge. Another example of primitive divination encountered at the Central market of Riga or cities of Rēzekne and Daugavpils is about people who let their guinea pig or domesticated jackdaw or thrush pick a card from a box of cards full with naïve texts such as "you can expect changes in your life" or "you will receive a happy news" and earn small money from foolish strangers (Vēriņš 1957).

#### 'Everyday superstitions'

Similar to the manner of exposing delusive beliefs, for example, in horoscopes and other future predictions are instances of 'everyday superstitions' which are mostly understood as believing in signs that can bring good or bad luck. Most clichéd examples of bad signs are – seeing a black cat, using number 13 in different occasions, or believing in an 'evil eye'. These stories are refuted by explanations that they have superstitious and religious origins of which none can be scientifically proved. Other everyday practices of magical thinking such as using amulets or carrying out some rituals to attract a good luck are also described in the Soviet Latvian press. For example, student superstitions and rituals before exams are often used as an example of irrational thinking (Padomju Students 1949). One of the examples, is the superstition that undergraduates should never walk on the central stairs of the University of Latvia because otherwise they will fail the exams (Padomju Jaunatne 1978). Around the 1970s the attitudes towards everyday superstitions seem to become less dramatic and the militant tone of fighting superstitions has changed into a more informative, admmissive and somewhat humoristic attitude. For example, an



Figure 3. Cartoon *Motorizētā māņticība* [The Motorised Superstition]. Author S. Gūtmanis. Published in the newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* [Soviet Youth], No 195, 02.10.1954.

interview with the university graduates published in 1971 features a question “Have you ever had any studently superstitions?” and their answers include a range of justifications for everyday superstitions such as wearing the same shirt or not shaving during the exam period, avoiding cats crossing their way, going up the central stairs of the university before graduation or paying attention to the first person they meet in the morning – a man or a woman (Pūpols 1971). Another example of a good luck that can be attracted by touching a button of a chimneysweeper is also mentioned in some articles (Salkovs 1970; Zvaigzne 1984). Some newspaper satire is devoted to the belief that number 13 is a bad sign (Rauhvargers 1981), while some others list the occasions when this superstition has been practiced in the capitalist countries. It is told that 13 is believed to be a ‘devil’s dozen’ and the foreign hotels do not have a room No. 13 (Bajevs & Šisakovs 1947), they omit number 13 in the floor numbering, or it is

substituted with “12-a” in the flight numbers and airplane seat numbering (Ostroumovs 1966). This belief is considered absurd and unscientific, therefore the press tries to disprove and ridicule these ideas to discourage the Soviet citizens of believing in similar nonsense.

### Rituals and superstitions of individual professional groups

Paradoxically, some superstitions or behaviours described as superstitious in the later Soviet period appear to be more tolerated than others. It concerns certain professions or specialists who represent such fields as sport, art or culture. Some sports’ journalists are quite explicitly describing how magical thinking is manifested in sports, especially about talismans or rituals that are believed to bring victory to the athletes. Such insight is given in a feature about the famous Latvian female basketball team ‘TTT’, telling more in detail about what rituals and amulets the players value. For example, if in the previous day they had won a game, the players would try to sit on the bench in the same order as they did yesterday, in attempt to attract a ‘good luck’. Or during the game, the coach’s assistant would hold a tattered teddy bear in her hands as a talisman of the team. However, they themselves claim that this is not a superstition but a sports’ psychology and a team’s secret that might look illogical to some (Kehris 1978).

Another trait of superstition is observed in several interviews with writers, artists, film and theatre directors and also athletes, who often at the end of the interview express unwillingness to talk about their future plans as it would be a sign of a ‘bad luck’. The reporters do not question that and even accentuate this superstition as forgivable to people who create cultural and artistic values or who have good results in sports. For example, a journalist asks the film director Gunārs Cilinskis “Will you not tell us about your future because of superstition?” and the director, perhaps, jokingly, confirms that he is indecently superstitious and believes in miracles (Ābolaņa 1988).

There are also descriptions of some other professional superstitions that were characteristic to hunters, sailors or even, in one case, a doctor. For example, one article explains some of the professional superstitions as more prominent in such fields where success depends not only on the skills and diligence of the person but also on unpredictable circumstances. This case is illustrated with several superstitions practiced by hunters – never imagine the trophy or do not tell anyone about your plans to go hunting (Kogtevs 1985). A feature about sailing competition in Riga includes a description of some rituals practiced by sailors to attract the wind in a breezeless day – some scratch the masts of their yachts, while others are whistling (Sīpa 1957). Also, in an interview with a paediatrician, she tells about a some sort of superstitious belief, admitting that she is not throwing out a basket of already wizened flowers that were given to her by a mother of a very sick boy, believing that this symbolically would keep the boy healthy and he would not need to return (Jugāne 1974). Thus, even people who are expected to have undoubtable ‘belief’ in modern medicine and science, are expressing a necessity for additional inner comfort that is achieved through some level of magical thinking.

## Conclusions

To sum up, this article was an attempt to identify the frequency of occurrence of keywords ‘occultism’, ‘magic’ and ‘superstition’ and analyse the explanations and attitudes in the press of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic in the period 1945–1989. A content analysis was used to ascertain the frequency of the keywords in the periodicals and it was found out that the term ‘occultism’ appeared in 31, ‘magic’ in 486 and ‘superstition’ in 932 articles of the Soviet Latvian press. The analysis of these articles provided seven themes under which the different aspects of occultism, magical thinking and superstitions were classified. The themes were the following: (1) Magical thinking as the prime origin of religion; (2) Superstition as a primitive way of explaining natural phenomena;

(3) Mediumship and spirit summoning seances, e.g. table turning, the Ouija boards; (4) Quackery or health fraud, such as practices of witch doctors, casting on spells, folk healing; (5) Divination or fortune telling, e.g. astrology, chiromancy, palmistry, cartomancy; (6) 'Everyday superstitions', such as good/bad signs bringing good/bad luck; (7) Rituals and superstitions inherent to individual professional groups.

The explanations of the origins of superstitions and magical thinking often followed a unified pattern in the Soviet media and the most recurrent ones were that they derive from ancient human societies as a form of primitive religion. Many publications insisted that magical thinking is inherent to all present religions, these phenomena often became addressed by a common phrase – 'religion and superstition' or 'religious superstition'. The attitude towards all superstitions was condemning and the published articles declared them unscientific and obscurant, and people who practiced them – reactionary and uncultured. In addition to explanations based on a historical approach, a political dimension of rivalry with Western capitalist countries was added to create repulsive attitude towards magical thinking and superstitions, claiming that one of the ways how the minds of the working-class people in the West are obscured, is the widespread promotion and popularity of various kinds of superstitions, such as fortune telling, astrology, spiritualism, chiromancy, let alone the traditional religions. Didactic and ideological instructions of proper scientific and materialistic worldview and moral obligations necessary to observe by Soviet citizens followed depictions of various ways how superstitions were manifested and earned from in the 'rotten' West, and, shamefully, also practiced by some 'reactionaries' in the Soviet Union, deserving ridicule and condemnation. However, in the later years of the Soviet period in Latvia, some superstitious behaviours were depicted with less of a moral panic, for example, rituals and talismans treasured by professional athletes or sports teams or accepting that artists and creatives can be somewhat superstitious with not disclosing their future plans as if it would bring 'bad luck'. Still, the majority of superstitions, everyday magic and occult practices were described as foreign, harmful and



disreputable to the Soviet people who were ideologically seen as potent enough to affect their own and the planet's future in contrast to passively believing in predestination, fate and 'secret powers' that rule over the man and nature.

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## **PARANORMAL BELIEFS IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION: RELATIONS WITH RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY**

*Suppression of religious institutions during the Soviet regime might have caused the former Soviet population to substitute religion with paranormal belief, and therefore it is important to study paranormal belief in relation with religiosity and spirituality, in the light of the Soviet Union. The participants (N=229) were from five post-soviet countries (Russia, Georgia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Kazakhstan). Participants completed an online survey consisting of the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (RPBS) plus the Ghosts subscale from Manchester Metropolitan University paranormal belief scale (MMUpbs), Spiritual Perspective Scale (SPS) and the abbreviated version of Springfield Religiosity Scale (SRS). Participants reported low religiosity, while paranormal belief was moderate, and spirituality was high. Spirituality was a significant predictor for paranormal belief, while no relation was found between religiosity and paranormal belief. The article discusses the possible explanations for such results.*

*Keywords: paranormal belief, spirituality, religiosity, the former Soviet Union, belief systems*

### **Introduction**

Suppression of religious institutions during the Soviet regime, might have caused the former Soviet population to uptake paranormal belief and superstition (Utinans et al, 2015). Russification and Sovietization forced

atheism on the population and tried to invalidate their religions; during the Soviet regime, the role of church was disvalued. There is a suggestion that this made people take up something that is referred to as “invisible religion” – belief in paranormal (Utinans et al, 2015). Torgler (2007) found high levels of superstitious beliefs in former communist countries, suggesting that while religiosity was in decline during the Soviet Union, superstition, which is a type of paranormal belief, acted as its substitute. Such beliefs are in a way competing with other forms of beliefs that are also based on the existence of higher forces. The aim of this research is to better understand the nature of paranormal beliefs by studying them in relation to religiosity and spirituality.

**Spirituality, Religiosity and Paranormal Belief.** There is a conceptual overlap between spirituality, religiosity, and paranormal belief but there is no concise distinction between the constructs. There is no single and clear definition of what the term ‘paranormal’ means, but the most widely used definition is one of Broad’s (1978), according to whom, paranormal belief encompasses phenomena that violate scientific principles. However, this definition is contradictory, as various paranormal beliefs are not falsifiable, and therefore cannot be tested with the scientific method.

In the current research, the term ‘paranormal beliefs’ refers to the set of phenomena that has not been proven by science, but is upheld by non-scientific communities and people that are, within their society, considered as being capable of rational thought (Drinkwater et.al 2017). There is a conceptual overlap between spirituality, religiosity and paranormal belief but there is no concise distinction between the constructs. RPBS includes both religiosity and spirituality as a subscale (Tobacyk and Milford, 1983), but paranormal belief has been widely studied (using RPBS) in conjunction with religiosity and spirituality as separate constructs. MacDonald (2000) categorized religiosity and paranormal belief as subcategories of spirituality. Although in the wide scope of research, these constructs are considered to be related, but still separate from each other (Schofield et al., 2016). Mattis (2000) found that the key difference

between the perception of religiosity and spirituality, is that religion is seen as a tool, while spirituality is more of an outcome. MacDonald (2000) classifies religion as a combination of one's religious belief and practices, considering it as an aspect of spirituality, rather than a separate construct. Both religion and spirituality are strongly related with each other, and both of them are known to stimulate similar cognitive processes and behavior, such as: advocating for social justice, experience of hope and forgiveness, desire for relational commitment, and quest for individual significance (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). In order to see distinctions between the two concepts, both of them have to be described separately. Spirituality is defined as an extent to which a person has a perceived relationship with divine forces or/and god. Spirituality is personal and is not connected to, or arises from religious institutions (Elkins et.al., 1988). It is often-times considered as a form of worldview, as it encompasses a set of values, which are similar to, but independent from the values taught by religious teachings (Lin et.al, 2017).

Religiosity consists of multiple dimensions, and throughout the last decade, it is becoming clear that it cannot be measured as a unitary construct. Religiosity can be categorized as intrinsic and extrinsic (Allport & Ross, 1967). The main idea of intrinsic religiosity is to live according to religion because one sincerely wants and strives to. On the contrary, a person with extrinsic religiosity uses religion for personal purposes like gaining social support and becoming socially included (Cohen, et.al., 2005). Other dimensions of religiosity include but are not limited to: religious coping, religious support, organizational religiousness, religious preference, religious experiences, intrinsic religious motivation, etc.; each of these dimensions are studied separately (Pargament, 1999). Out of all the dimensions of religiosity, intrinsic religious motivation was found to be the strongest predictor for spirituality, while extrinsic religiosity was negatively correlated with it (Berkel & Armstrong et.al, 2004). Furthermore, intrinsic religiosity is oftentimes associated with spirituality, as both of them are personal and can exist without participating in organized religion (Cohen et.al, 2005).

Religious people belonging to conservative denominations score very low on paranormal belief (Donahue, 1993) and people who have no religious commitment score higher on paranormal than those who have religious preference (Emmons and Sobal, 1981). Predominantly among Christian population, religiosity was often negatively correlated with the belief in paranormal, while it was opposite for spirituality (Hergovich & Schott et al., 2005). The dimension of religiosity that was negatively correlated with paranormal is religious participation/organizational religiousness – which includes church attendance (Orenstein, 2002). Church can be one of the reasons for why religiosity is considered as more denominational, dogmatic, and doctrinal, while a main assumption of spirituality is the idea that there is life, that humans cannot perceive or find evidence for (Pargament, 1999). Church teachings often suppress the various types of paranormal belief, including tarot, astrology, and psi; it also condemns witchcraft and refers to it as ‘heresy,’ which can explain the neglect of paranormal belief by church-goers (Torgler, 2007).

Belief in the paranormal seems to be greatest among spiritual people, who are not religious (Kennedy, 2004). Spiritual people often abstain from religious practices, refuse to be a part of any organized religion, and highly value personal spiritual experiences. Spiritual practices have shown to increase spiritual experiences, which are at the core a part of the paranormal (Murphy, 1992). After studying near-death experiences, Ring (1984) suggested that paranormal experiences cause people to become spiritual, but not religious. The same results were discovered while studying psi experiences, which often presents as a primary factor for spiritual growth in individuals (Kennedy, 2005). Kennedy (2004) suggests that spirituality and paranormal belief reinforce each other’s development, supposing that one does not arise from the other, but they are both constructs that correlate and interact with each other.

A person becomes receptive to paranormal beliefs due to the need to satisfy his/her spiritual yearning – which relates to spirituality as much as to intrinsic religiosity (Rosenthal, 1997). Paranormal beliefs, religiosity,



and spirituality are considered to act as substitutes for each other, which is one of the reasons for why paranormal belief is sometimes referred to as “invisible religion” (Persinger & Makarec, 1990). Therefore, during the Soviet regime, where extrinsic religiosity was suppressed, not only paranormal belief but also spirituality and paranormal belief together, might have acted as substitutes to religion – but whether this would remain true for a person with high intrinsic religiosity is not clear.

**Cross-cultural differences in paranormal belief.** The influence of cultural differences on paranormal belief has been observed while looking at how people from different countries adopt religious or mystical beliefs (Hollinger and Smith, 2002). National differences are obvious in global paranormal belief, belief in reincarnation, and psi beliefs (Torgler, 2007). For example, 42 percent of Americans reported believing in haunted houses, which is not a prominent belief amongst Europeans. Moreover, paranormal belief scores are highest in places where living standards and quality of life are low (Hollinger & Smith, 2002). Cultural and historical factors can influence one type of paranormal to be more widespread in the country than others (Irwin, 2009). Globalization can reduce such differences, as immigration and popularization of media products are very prominent. Some might argue that globalization has already greatly influenced the world to adopt similar beliefs, rather than different ones (Shimazono, 1999). However, cross-cultural differences are still observed, and therefore, have to be better studied (Kim, 2005).

Cross-cultural studies on paranormal belief have excluded the east from the spotlight, though some research has been done. A cross-cultural study by Torgler (2007) found that people from the former Soviet Union had the highest scores on superstition when compared to other demographic groups. These results were confirmed by Bayer and colleagues’ (2018) study of paranormal beliefs amongst Israelites and immigrants from the post-Soviet Union in Israel. Taivans (1997) studied paranormal belief amongst youth in Latvia and found relatively higher scores than in other European countries.

Although, paranormal belief is not underpinned by culture and therefore cannot be upheld due to cultural reasons. Orenstein (2002) suggested that religion and religiosity can influence the prominence of paranormal belief, as unlike paranormal phenomena, religion is supported by culture. The dimensions of paranormal belief that Torgler (2007) found higher amongst people from the former Soviet Union include: belief in fortune telling, talismans for luck, and credibility of horoscope predictions. Such findings can be explained by findings that active participation in religious institutions is negatively correlated with superstitions, and the population of the former Soviet Union is detached from organizational religious institutions (Orenstein, 2002). And as mentioned before, various dimensions of paranormal belief are suppressed by church teachings, and therefore are not held by church-goers (Torgler, 2007). Whether religious institutions suppressed or encouraged paranormal belief before the Soviet before the Soviet era, might have depended on the denomination, as Orthodoxy tolerates gnostic speculations while Catholicism suppresses it. But the regime itself has brought social stress upon the population, and belief in the paranormal has been referred to as a “symptom of social and cultural stress” by Rosenthal (1997).

The youth in former Soviet countries have not been brought up during the Soviet regime, and therefore they might be less superstitious than adults. In 2015, 55 % of the Russian population believed in precognition, 48 % in witchcraft, 50 % in superstition and one third in astrology. Since then, all dimensions of paranormal belief have become less and less believable for the Russian population and the percentages dropped drastically during the last five years (Russian Public Opinion Research Center, 2019). In addition, comparison of paranormal beliefs amongst students from Poland and the United States showed no differences between levels of belief in paranormal. Youth of both nations scored high on traditional religious belief, but low in witchcraft, spiritualism and superstition (Tobacyk & Tobacyk, 1992). Studies in Latvia and Nordic countries have found that some people do not believe in anything and do not substitute their lack of religiosity with occult beliefs (Utinans, 2015; Sjodin 2002;

Haraldsson and Houtkooper, 1996). Therefore, age is an important factor to consider when studying these populations.

### Research Paradigm and Hypotheses

The aim of this research is to explore paranormal belief, spirituality, and religiosity in the former Soviet (> 30 years) and post-Soviet (< 30 year) population. All surveys were conducted in Russia to reach different age groups, including the generation born before the 1990s, that were older than 30 years of age. As religion suppresses certain types of paranormal beliefs (Torgler, 2007), it was hypothesized that religiosity would be negatively correlated with paranormal belief. As spirituality is not dogmatic and allows for subjective experiences and perceptions of the world (Shiah, et.al., 2013), it was hypothesized that paranormal belief would be positively correlated with spirituality, and negatively with religiosity.

## Chapter III: Methods

### Participants

The study had 229 participants from five former Soviet countries including: Georgia ( $n = 50$ ), Russia ( $n = 45$ ), Ukraine ( $n = 67$ ), Kazakhstan ( $n = 30$ ), and Lithuania ( $n = 38$ ). All of the participants were Russian-speaking and of various religious backgrounds, the majority being Orthodox Christians ( $n = 96$ ), Catholics ( $n = 29$ ), and Protestants ( $n = 35$ ). In terms of sex, 55 % ( $n = 129$ ) were females and 44.1 % ( $n = 100$ ) males. Purposeful sampling was used along with snowball sampling in order to recruit the participants. The survey was distributed via social media platforms, and no financial benefit was offered for the participation in the study.

### Instruments and Methods

**Demographics.** The demographic sheet consisted of questions concerning sex, age, country of origin and religious background, options being: Agnostic, Atheist, Orthodox Christian, Catholic Christian, Muslim,

Protestant Christian, Other – where they had to indicate their religious background, and ‘prefer not to say’ was also included as an option (In the section of ‘Sex’ and ‘Religious background’ only) for ethical reasons.

**Paranormal Belief.** To assess the level of paranormal belief, multi-dimensional measures – Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (RPBS, Tobacyk and Milford, 1983) was used. RPBS is the most prominently used measure for assessing paranormal belief, and it is valued for its multidimensionality. RPBS originally consisted of seven different dimensions of paranormal including: traditional religious belief, witchcraft, spiritualism, superstition, psi belief, precognition, and extraordinary life forms. For the current research, for the sake of preventing inflating the data, spirituality and traditional religious belief subscales were removed from RPBS. RPBS had 26 items in total and used a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7). For example, one of the questions from the superstition subscale included: “If you break a mirror, you will have bad luck,” and “Black cats can bring bad luck.” A sample item from Psi belief included: “A person’s thoughts can influence the movement of a physical object.”

One item in the subscale of ‘extraordinary life form’ was slightly modified to prevent confusion. “The Loch Ness Monster of Scotland Exists” was modified to “The Loch Ness Monster of Scotland Exists/Existed” as the Loch Ness monster myth originated in the 1930s, and No new data has emerged since 1975. The creature was often considered to be the only of its kind, and therefore people who believe that it existed, might consider that for now it is dead, which would explain why sightings have not occurred for more than 45 years.

Manchester Metropolitan University (MMUpbs) is a relatively new measure for assessing the level of paranormal belief and consists of 64 items. Out of 8 subscales, only one subscale was used in the current study – the subscale of Ghosts/Hauntings. This subscale consists of 8 items, e.g. “Some places are haunted by spirits or souls of people now dead,” “People have genuinely seen ‘ghosts’ or ‘apparitions’ and ‘Poltergeists

exist'." Items used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). This subscale was merged with RPBS. As Ghosts subscale had more items than other subscales, the average scores were used to calculate the total scores for each subscale. The sum of the averages of all subscales was used to calculate overall paranormal belief scores.

**Extrinsic Religiosity.** In order to assess religiosity amongst participants, the abbreviated version of Springfield Religiosity Scale (SRS) was applied. It consists of 1 three subscales: organizational religious activity (ORA), non-organizational religious activity (NORA), and intrinsic religiosity (IR), however the IR subscale was not used. The subscale of ORA consisted of 2 items with Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Several times a week") to 6 ("Never"), one of the questions being the following: "How often do you attend church services?"; NORA consisted of 3 items, with all questions having Likert scale range from 1 to 6. Questions for NORA included items like: "How often do you pray privately?" and "How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature (journals, newspapers, books) at home?". The item: "How often do you listen to or watch religious programs on radio or TV?" was modified to "How often do you listen to or watch religious programs/podcasts/videos on 'Youtube' or TV?". Such modification made the question more relevant for the present times.

**Spirituality.** Spirituality was measured using the Spiritual Perspective Scale (SPS). SPS consists of 10 items, categorized into spiritual beliefs and behaviors. Spiritual behaviors were measured with 4 items, measuring how often participants engage in spiritual activities, e.g. "Discuss spiritual matters" or "read spirituality-related material." Choices ranged from 1 (not at all) to 6 (once a day). Spiritual beliefs consisted of 6 items, choices ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). None of the items that were in spiritual beliefs, specified or implied belief in any religion. Only one question referred to 'god': "I feel close to god or a higher power."

### Procedure

The survey was distributed online and included informed consent form, RPBS, SPS, and SRS respectively. RPBS was already adapted in Russian language by Grigoryev (2015), and the same translation was used for the current research. SPS scale and SRS were translated by following the standard academic procedure – at first it was translated from English to Russian, and then back from Russian to English by two different individuals. Finally, a third party explored whether there were discrepancies between the initial English version and the translated one. Spirituality was intentionally put prior to religiosity to avoid causing participants to view spirituality through the limits of organized religion.

### Data analysis

Data was analyzed using the JASP statistical program. The relationship between the spirituality and paranormal belief was analyzed by computing simple regression, where spirituality was the predictor for paranormal belief scores. Simple regression was computed to also observe the relation between paranormal belief and religiosity, where religiosity was an independent variable. The scores of two subscales of religiosity (ORA, NORA) were summed and were not analyzed separately.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Data Screening

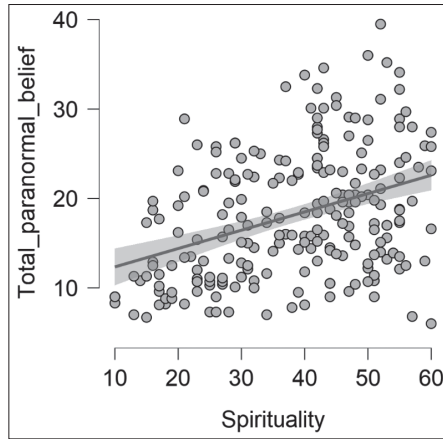
Religiosity subscales (ORA, NORA) were highly correlated ( $r = 0.747$ ,  $p < .001$ ), therefore they were combined and the sum of the scores were used for the analysis to prevent multicollinearity. All total scales were normally distributed. Most of the scales showed good or excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .8$ ), the psi belief, superstition, and pre-cognition subscales showed acceptable reliability ( $\alpha > .7$ ), and the extraordinary life forms subscale showed questionable reliability ( $\alpha > .6$ ).

### Spirituality, Religiosity and Paranormal Belief

In relation to the range of the scales, religiosity was found to be low in post-soviet population ( $M = 11.6$ , range 5–30), while paranormal belief was moderate ( $M = 18$ , range 5–39.5), and spirituality was high ( $M = 38.1$ , range = 10–60). Two-way mixed ANOVA was carried out to examine the interaction of sex and different types of paranormal belief. A  $6 \times 2$  ANOVA with types of paranormal belief as within-subjects factor (witchcraft, psi, superstition, extraordinary life forms, precognition, ghosts) and sex (male, female) as between-subjects factors revealed a main effects of paranormal belief,  $F(3.29, 740.28) = 89.016$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.151$  and sex,  $F(1, 225) = 15.609$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.031$ . These main effects were qualified by an interaction between types of paranormal belief and sex,  $F(3.29, 740.28) = 9.209$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.016$ . The Bonferroni post hoc test show that most types of paranormal beliefs are significantly different from each of the other beliefs, except from precognition from ghosts ( $p = 0.193$ ), extraordinary life forms from precognition ( $p = 0.082$ ), psi beliefs from extraordinary life forms, and precognition ( $p = 0.284$ ,  $p = 1.00$  respectively). The most believed type of paranormal is witchcraft, followed by ghosts, precognition, psi, extraordinary life forms, and superstition respectively. Bonferroni corrected post hoc testing showed that paranormal belief was lowest for superstition ( $MD = 2.12$ ).

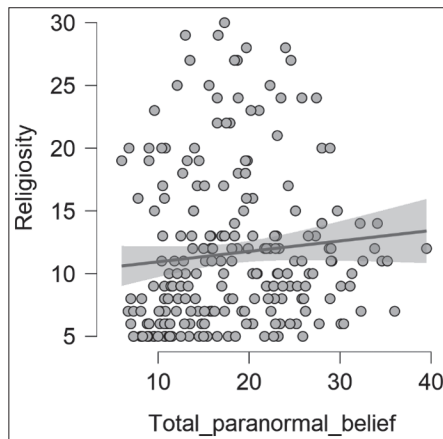
A linear regression established that spirituality can be a statistically significant predictor of paranormal belief,  $F(1, 227) = 38.888$ ,  $p < .001$ . Spirituality accounted for 14.1% of the explained variability in paranormal belief, which is a moderate value (Cohen, 1988). The regression equation was: predicted paranormal belief =  $10.20 + 0.207x$  (spirituality). Heteroscedasticity was observed in the data, after examining the scores on regression standardized residuals – as can be seen in Fig.1, there is an empty quadrant on the top left corner of regressions line. All other assumptions of linear regression were met.

Figure 1. Regression line depicting relationship between spirituality and paranormal belief, with 95% confidence intervals.



A linear regression established that religiosity did not predict paranormal belief,  $F(1, 227) = 2.090, p = 0.150$ , and religiosity accounted for only 0.9% of the explained variability in paranormal belief. The regression equation was: predicted paranormal belief =  $16.81 + 0.110x$  (religiosity). Inspection of boxplot and casewise diagnostics showed one potential outlier with a moderate standardized residual of 3.03. Due to the large sample size ( $N = 229$ ) the outlier was not deleted. All other assumptions of linear regression were met.

Figure 2. Regression line depicting interaction between religiosity and paranormal belief, with 95% confidence intervals.





### Age differences in paranormal belief, spirituality and religiosity

Data was not normally distributed for any scale at either age groups (Sharpior-Wilk  $p < .05$ ). With the large sample size ( $>30$ ), violation of normality shall not be an issue (Pallant, 2007). Therefore, a large sample of the current study ( $N=229$ ) compensated for the violations of normality. The assumption of equal variance was violated for spirituality and religiosity (Levene's test  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, such violation was corrected by applying a Welch correction.

An independent t-test showed that people older than 30 believe in the paranormal significantly more than people born after the Soviet regime  $t(224) = 2.392$ ,  $p = 0.018$ . Cohen's  $d$  suggests that this is a small effect ( $d = 0.316$ ). An independent t-test showed no differences in religiosity of people older than 30 than people born after the Soviet regime,  $t(211) = 0.962$ ,  $p=0.337$ , Cohen's  $d=0.127$ . An independent t-test showed that people older than 30 were significantly more spiritual than people born after the Soviet regime,  $t(223) = 3.895$ ,  $p < .001$ . Cohen's  $d$  suggests that this is a medium effect size ( $d = 0.514$ ).

### Discussion

The aim of the study was to look at how religiosity and spirituality interact with paranormal belief in countries that underwent the Soviet regime. Findings of previous research have been mixed, and the nature of relationships between the concepts (paranormal belief, religiosity, spirituality) are still unclear, as past research either considered all the concepts to be one or claimed that all of the concepts are separate and they act as substitutes for each other (Torgler, 2007; Utinans et al, 2015).

### Paranormal Belief, Spirituality, and Religiosity

Spirituality was a predictor of paranormal belief. Such findings are in line with previous research, which also shows a positive relationship (Kennedy, 2004), but whether one construct truly arises from the other is the matter of discussion. The distribution of data (Figure 1) revealed that

people mainly fell into three categories: First are the people who score low on both and therefore are not prone to believe in either of them – such people can be categorized as secular. Sjodin (1995) suggested that the belief in science and technology might explain such results. Science itself can also be used as a substitute to religion, as just like belief in religion, belief in science increases during stressful times, and can be used to compensate for the lack of control (Kay & Whitson, et.al, 2009). Faith in science was also found to decrease one's existential anxiety (Farias & Newheiser et.al, 2013). It is widely suggested that secularized society needs to replace religion with the other alternative, in order to find some source for meaning – which as Dawkins (1998) suggests can be provided by science. Similarly to belief in religion, belief in science can also be dogmatic, which is referred to as “scientism” (Stenmark, 2001).

Secondly, there are people who score high on both spirituality and paranormal belief – for whom these two constructs can be intertwined and one can arise from the other. Such people can be spiritual at the expense of paranormal belief or experiences. In the study done by Kennedy and Kanthamani (1995), 72 % of the participants reported becoming more spiritual as a result of their paranormal experience. Therefore, spirituality can be the product of paranormal belief, especially when such belief is caused by paranormal experience (Kennedy and Kanthamani, 1995).

The third category includes people that scored high on spirituality but low on paranormal belief, which can be either due to them being religious<sup>1</sup> or being individuals that are expressing spirituality through other non-institutional or anti-institutional pathways<sup>2</sup> (Zuidervaart, 2010).

There was no relationship between religiosity and paranormal belief. The findings of the past research on the relationships between religiosity and paranormal vary and are inconclusive, sometimes pointing to negative relationship between the two (Beck & Miller, 2001), positive relationships (Thalbourne & Houtkooper, 2002), or no relationships (Thalbourne & Delin, 1993). Thalbourne and O'Brien (1999) observed that different

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. from conservative denomination discouraging paranormal belief

<sup>2</sup> E.g. personal authenticity, nature mysticism

relations were observed between the constructs when measured with different tools. As religiosity measure adapted for the current research was designed for Christian population, it might not have been the best fit for assessing religiosity in population with various religious backgrounds. Therefore, assessment tool used for the current research might have influenced the depiction of relationship between the constructs.

Another reason for why it is hard to compare to past research, can be the heterogeneity of samples in this field of research. Current research consisted of samples that included five different nationalities, around fifteen different religious backgrounds, and different age groups. While a negative relationship between the paranormal belief and religiosity often occurs when religious people belong to conservative denominations (Donahue, 1993), the population for the current research was mostly Christian and largely (41 %) Orthodox. Orthodoxy, unlike Catholicism, approves of personal religious experience and speculations (Rosenthal, 1997). Furthermore, when there is negative a relationship between the constructs, it is often interpreted as paranormal belief acting as a substitute to religion, (Shiah, et.al., 2013) which might not be the case with largely Orthodox population, for whom paranormal belief can act as an extension of belief, but not as a substitute.

### Age Differences in Belief

In contrast to the new generation, people that lived through the Soviet regime were found to be more spiritual, and believe more strongly in the paranormal. Stronger belief in paranormal can be explained by revival of occult beliefs during the Soviet era, as occult motifs were integrated in Soviet propaganda itself (Rosenthal, 1997).

Religiosity did not differ between the age groups – and overall it has been low for the observed population. This can be explained by the suppression of church during the Soviet regime, but for the people born after the fall of the Soviet Union, this can be attributed to the invalidation of church in the modern world, as for young people religion is associate with church and rituals (Demmrich & Riegel, 2020).

### Paranormal Belief in the former Soviet Union

Overall the participants had some conviction in paranormal phenomena. In contrast with other cultures, the most prominent paranormal belief in the former Soviet population is belief in witches/witchcraft. Meanwhile, Nordic countries believe most strongly in precognition and Extraordinary life forms, and Americans favor belief in ghosts/hauntings (Irwin, 2009, Sjodin, 2002) The reasons behind such cross-cultural differences are yet unknown and need to be further studied. The only type of paranormal which was treated with near-complete skepticism was superstition. Such results are contrary to Torgler's research (2007), which found particularly high superstition in the Soviet population. The possible reason for low superstition can be easy access to information or the rise of scientific revolution. It is more likely that the items assessing superstition are no longer relevant to the study population<sup>3</sup>. As the superstition is almost like a trademark of miners, pilots, sailors, and sports fans – one would think that it is taken up when a person feels the lack of control, because the occupations listed above helps the person realize that the course of events lies outside of their control (Dwyer & Slavich et.al, 2017). Meanwhile, as humanity's control over nature has increased through technological advancements, a person might not as often fall into situations where they feel a lack of control (Sjodin, 1995).

It is likely that the items assessing superstition are no longer relevant to the study population. Belief in superstition is not necessarily eradicated, but certain superstitions can be replaced with the other ones (Savickaitė, 2012). As tradition is non-changing, traditional superstitious and magical beliefs are also thought to be consistent, but as Savickaitė (2012) argued, modernity is only a succession of traditional beliefs. Nowadays, people might not believe in black cats or broken mirrors bringing bad luck. However, research studying superstition in Lithuanian students showed that some of the females do not wash their hair because they

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. "Black cats can bring bad luck"; "The number '13' is unlucky"

think that water will wash away what they learned<sup>4</sup> – which is a belief similar to the one that existed in Lithuanian folk culture. While in earlier times people were performing non-hygienic acts to either protect themselves from illnesses or troubles in the household<sup>5</sup>, nowadays superstitions are modified and used to solve practical problems that concern townspeople (Savickaitė 2012; Shumov, 2003).

### Why Do We Believe?

It is important to ask why do people have spiritual yearning in the first place, and what can be the possible functions of religiosity, spirituality, and paranormal belief. Key theories that try to explain possible functions of paranormal belief are: Social Marginality Hypothesis, Deprivation theory, and Keinan's motivational control model. The most prominent theory is *Social marginality hypothesis* (Castro & Burrows et al. 2014), according to which susceptibility to paranormal beliefs is considered to be more prominent amongst marginalized groups of people, which would be the unemployed or low-class representatives, with poor education and status. These people try to gain power and control through believing in religious, spiritual or magical things (Irwin & Watt, 2007). The more emotionally vulnerable and powerless the person feels, the more appealing the paranormal beliefs should be to them. Passivity in life is more easily justified when people believe in the rewards of the afterlife (Jang & Johnson, 2003).

Factors that can affect a person being socially marginalized are: sex, gender, economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age. The group that is socially dominant have less paranormal beliefs: men rather than women, white rather than black (in US), and younger people rather than older (French & Stone, 2014). Nevertheless, the empirical evidence on the matter is mixed, which is why social marginality theory is often refuted (Aarnio & Lindeman, 2005) There is a vast amount of literature showing

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<sup>4</sup> For the same reason males do not shave their beards

<sup>5</sup> E.g. If a female brushes her hair on certain days, hens will destroy her garden

little correlation between upholding a paranormal belief and being socially marginalized. Unemployment and low levels of education are not correlated with paranormal belief, although both the unemployed and under-educated could be considered as socially marginalized (Emmons & Sobal, 1981).

Deprivation theory suggests that paranormal beliefs are taken up as a coping mechanism to deal with either physical or psychological hardships, especially by people who have low economic and social status (Rice, 2003). Deprivation theory also tries to explain religiousness and spirituality, as accumulated research shows that socioeconomic deprivation increases religiosity and spirituality of vulnerable social groups (Spilka & Hood et.al, 2003). This theory resembles social marginality theory, but presents paranormal belief as a defense mechanism (Torgler, 2007). It is backed up by the research findings according to which divorced couples report stronger belief in paranormal, which bores a suggestion that paranormal belief can be attained with low social support, especially when people feel powerless. But this can be easily refuted as research states no instances, where people with strong paranormal beliefs are either emotionally unstable, cognitively impaired, but the opposite, it is suggested that they have stronger mental health and emotional balance, that does not necessarily arise from paranormal belief itself (Castro & Burrows et al. 2014; Greeley 1975).

Keinan's motivational-control model states that external stressors can lessen one's perceived control over their life, which results in an increase of paranormal belief (Utinans et al, 2015). Paranormal belief, religiosity, and spirituality provide people with a sense of protection – this idea is supported by Thalbourne's (1996) research showing that people who believe in eternal life have lower levels of anxiety and fear toward death. Residents of high-stress areas were found to be more disposed towards magical thinking, as it gives them a greater sense of control (Keinan, 1994). This theory is supported by the evidence on psi belief, according to which psi phenomena increase the sense of control in social situations (Kennedy, 2007). An extensive amount of research on psi shows that people

who have a low sense of control score high on psi belief. However, the motivational-control model was not supported by Utinans et.al (2015), who found low paranormal belief in post-soviet Latvia, suggesting that paranormal belief is only one of the possible ways to increase one's sense of control, but does not necessarily arise in a vulnerable population.

Maslow (1964) suggested that belief in religion and religious experiences can lead to mental and physical wellbeing – and viewed it as a “peak experience” in his hierarchy of needs. Spirituality provides people with the sense of meaning and purpose in life, as well as creates the sense of interconnectedness with the world and with other people (Lin, Clark, Maher, 2017). The health benefits of spirituality and religiosity can support this idea (Larson & Larson, 2003; Pargament, 1999). After having self-actualization as the highest need, Maslow (1969a) redefined his model and claimed that the final need for humans is self-transcendence. Maslow claimed that (1969b) most human needs are biological, but once they are achieved, further needs arise that transcend the material world. Self-transcendence is essentially associated with rising above oneself, thinking for the greater good and treating everything around as ends, rather than means. A fully developed person would be one that is concerned with things that are higher/better than self. Therefore, paranormal belief, spirituality, religiosity, and science can all be serving to satisfy the same need.

### Limitations

The results of the current research might have been influenced by methodological limitations. Firstly, as already mentioned, the items in the questionnaire might have been culturally irrelevant to participants, who varied by nationality and belief systems. Moreover, some of the items can be ambiguous for certain participants and might need clarifications, e.g. one of the participants, after filling out the survey wanted to clarify whether “Black cat can bring bad luck” means the idea that black cat running over in front of us will bring bad luck because there is a relation

between black cats and bad luck, or that the cat will bring bad luck because we believe so, not because cats and luck are related. Such questions concern the causality of belief, and are difficult to answer imminently in a remote mode.

Heterogeneity of the sample can also be a limitation, as Springfield Religiosity Scale was designed to assess religiosity predominantly within Christian population, which was supposedly representing either Catholic or Protestant denominations. Around 30 % of the participants did not report to be Christians, and therefore SRS might not have been the most applicable measure to assess their religiosity. The differences that exist between the denominations of Christianity itself mainly concern religious practices and therefore the expression of religiosity can vary not only among different religions, but also different denominations within a single religion.

## Conclusion

The current study examined how religiosity and spirituality are related to paranormal belief. The relations of paranormal belief with spirituality and religiosity still remain unclear, but the current study provides evidence for religiosity being an essentially different construct from paranormal belief, while spirituality was shown to be intertwined with both paranormal belief and religiosity. As demonstrated in this study, occult beliefs are syncretic, they can coexist with religious beliefs, but can also exist independently from them.

Participants in this study reported low levels of religiosity, moderate paranormal belief, and high spirituality, which gives us a view of a secularized population that still remains spiritual, and spirituality allows an individual to depend on his/her own values and beliefs versus the values taught by external authority. The times throughout history when the dependence on authority decreased were when either all of the credibility of the trusted authorities were being invalidated, or when there were a lot of alternatives on what ideology to choose. Sjodin (1995) argued that



nowadays the fragmentation of ideologies<sup>6</sup> and pluralism are dominating the minds of postmodern people. As the church has lost the monopoly on determining what people will believe and value, technology and science have taken its place – which also leads to a lack of trust in authority due to science's uncontrollable development. But current study shows that spirituality has not weakened, instead it is no longer being shaped by religious institutions, and it is speculated that some other institutions have taken its place.

## Appendix

### Data Screening Details

#### Reliability

Reliability measures of Cronbach's alpha indicated high reliability for 10-item Spiritual Perspective Scale ( $\alpha = .904$ ) and 26-item-modified Revised Paranormal Belief Scale ( $\alpha = .933$ ). Revised paranormal belief scale included witchcraft subscale ( $\alpha = .932$ ), psi belief subscale ( $\alpha = .765$ ), superstition subscale ( $\alpha = .753$ ), extraordinary life forms subscale ( $\alpha = .624$ ), precognition subscale ( $\alpha = .788$ ), and ghost subscale ( $\alpha = .867$ ) from MMUpbs. Total Cronbach's alpha for 5-item Springfield Religiosity scale indicated high reliability ( $\alpha = .878$ ). SRS includes the NORA ( $\alpha = .826$ ) subscale and ORA ( $\alpha = .761$ ) subscale.

#### Assumptions of Correlations

Paranormal belief scores were normally distributed with skewness of 0.47 (SE = 0.161) and a kurtosis of -0.443 (SE = 0.320). Data set for spirituality was normally distributed with a skewness of -0.297 (SE = 0.161) and a kurtosis of -0.966 (SE = 0.320). Values of religiosity were also-normally distributed with a skewness of 1.117 (SE = 0.161) and a kurtosis of 0.484 (SE = 0.320) (George & Mallery, 2010).

#### Assumptions of Regression

The assumption of linearity was not met for the relation between spirituality and paranormal belief. Visual inspection of histograms and

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<sup>6</sup> Choosing specific fragments from different ideologies, instead of following one ideology

Q-Q plots showed the near normal distribution of the data. The normal P-P plot of standardized residuals demonstrated that the data had approximately normally distributed errors. Heteroscedasticity was observed in the data, after examining the scores on regression standardized residuals. The data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 1.986). Casewise diagnostics and boxplot showed no outliers in the data. The normal P-P plot of standardized residuals demonstrated that the data had approximately normally distributed errors.

There was no linear relationship between paranormal beliefs and religiosity. Visual inspection of histograms and Q-Q plots showed the near normal distribution of the data. Heteroscedasticity was observed in the data, after examining the scores on regression standardized residuals. The data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 1.883). Inspection of boxplot and casewise diagnostics showed one potential outlier with a moderate standardized residual of 3.03. Due to the large sample size (N = 229) outlier was not deleted.

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