1. The term ‘scientific atheism’

The current set-up of Soviet atheist propaganda dates from late 1950s and early 1960s. The militant atheism of the inter-war years and the — in official parlance — neglect of atheist propaganda during the era of personality cult, were followed by the impetus of Khrushchev’s initiative. The campaign of 1959-1964 followed a false start in 1954. The full-scale assault on religion involved both political-administrative persecution of church organization and an ideological-propaganda attack on religion in the minds of the people.

The communist party’s new approach to atheist propaganda was classified as ‘scientific atheism’, not that it meant any fundamental departure from the past. Party literature talked of, ‘a new step’ in scientific atheism. The foregoing period was not condemned as unscientific, on the contrary, the message was continuity. Of course, such was long time common practice among the compilers of Soviet history: criticism of individuals and episodes neither implies nor involves doubt in the ever-soaring course of ideological tradition. Soviet history is re-written in the light of new ideological insights and expedience. And so, the new scientific approach to atheism was pre-dated back to the 1920s and represented as ‘restoration of Leninist norms’ (a key concept in Khrushchev’s general attempt to win back ideological credibility after de-Stalinization). Of the six men held up as the grand-old-men, the pioneers of scientific atheism — A. Lunacharsky,
P. Krasikov, N. Krupskaya, I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, Y. Yaroslavsky and B. Bonch-Bruyevich, all contemporaries and colleagues of Lenin — only the last was directly involved in the refinement of atheist propaganda. Yaroslavsky’s inclusion is remarkable: his Union of the Militant Godless was no more scientific than were his writings.

A review of atheist studies in the magazine *Voprosy Filosofii* went to considerable lengths in pointing out continuity between modern Soviet atheism and that of the 1920s. Without the shadow of a blush the article stated that “Leninist principles of atheist upbringing” were embodied and realized in the Union of Militant Godless and its two periodicals *Bezbožnik* and *Antireligioznik* (The Antireligionist) as well as the magazines *Revolution and Church*, *Ateist* (The Atheist) and *Pod Znamenem Markzisma* (Under the Banner of Marxism). *Bezbožnik u Stanka* (The Godless at the Lathe) was alone in being criticized for “deviation from Leninist principles, primitiveness and injury to the feelings of believers”. The 1940s and 50s were characterized as the period which lacked a “creative approach” to atheism — with a “revival of the theoretical approach” from 1954 onwards.

And so, just as militant atheism can be qualified as ‘scientific’, the term militant is by no means the exclusive prerogative of the first stage of Soviet atheism. Calls for scientific atheism to be combative and for the theory to be turned into militant propaganda, occur increasingly in contemporary writings. This linking of theory and practice is at the very heart of Soviet atheism, this is what distances it from ‘bourgeois’ atheism. Bourgeois atheism is theoretical and private whereas Soviet atheism has a socio-political dimension.

The validity of the expression ‘militant atheism’ in modern times was the theme of another article in *Voprosy Filosofii*. The title, *O Voinstvujuščem Materializme* (On Militant Materialism) referred to a similarly named publication by Lenin,
The term ‘scientific atheism’

his “atheist will and testament”, as it is commonly known. The article made an impassioned call for atheist propaganda to employ Leninist methodology characterized as this is above all by “a militancy and irreconcilability towards all forms of idealism and religion. And that means that materialism organically reaches that consequence and perfection which in the language of philosophy is called — militant atheism”. The author went on to set right several misunderstandings: use of the term was not to be confined to that period when the church was still in political opposition to the Soviet system; and loss of church influence in society did not make an anachronism out of calls for militancy. Anyone believing the contrary was according to the article, guilty of over-simplifying and vulgarizing the concept of militancy — a deviation from the Marxist-Leninist view of what is scientific. Militant was to be taken as neither an administrative liquidation of the church nor a Kulturkampf in the Bismarck mould, nor, yet again, offending the feelings of the faithful. What it did mean was an uncompromising attitude towards religion on the level of Weltanschauung and winning the hearts and minds of believers from a false philosophy.

The article went on to cover the then significance of the ‘militant’ concept at the international level: Soviet atheists were to combat Western Marxist’s conciliatory attitude towards religion, they were not to be misled by the process of renewal within Western churches nor by those churches altered standpoints on scientific and social questions: a dialogue twixt Marxism and Christianity was to be seen as the first move in assault on the monolithic integrity of Marxist theory. Voprosy Filosofii recognized that the circumstances of atheist propaganda in the Soviet Union had undergone major change. In half a century, religious belief had become an anachronism, socially and psychologically isolated in an overwhelmingly atheist community. Even so, the continued existence of religious groupings proved the continued relevance of Lenin’s ideas on atheist education. Readers
were reminded that adjustment by the churches to the Soviet system, and their active role in the struggle for peace, only served to obscure the incompatibility of religion and communism. The minority position of believers, and their consequent retreat into the laager mentality, was described as a further complication, making them less vulnerable to propaganda. At the same time, atheism needed to be reinforced among unbelievers who all too often held it as an opinion only, rather than a conscious conviction.

Considerable space went to the tolerant attitude of youth to religion — now the theme of a permanent item in modern Soviet atheist programme. Voprosy Filosofii warned that the young, never having known the church as oppressor, were drawn by its novelty (neobičnost’), its colourful liturgy, and its striking architecture and paintings. Alas, not all were able to discriminate between the religious and the aesthetic, the ecclesiastic and the worldly legacy: such could result in serious involvement in religion. Voprosy Filosofii detected the same lack of discrimination, even mild sympathy, among certain writers, poets and film makers whose work was too fond of religious imagery, expressions and attributes. Some historians and literary critics were similarly tainted by over preoccupation with Russia’s religious past and idealization of the church’s role in moulding the Russian character. The article closed with a call for philosophers and atheists to fight shoulder-to-shoulder in the struggle to solve for a number of new problems in atheist propaganda, specifically this meant:

- research into the socio-psychological causes for the continued existence of religion in Soviet society;
- the working-out of a philosophy of the human personality, the question of the meaning of life, the question of good and evil;
- fundamental re-thinking of ethical and aesthetical values.

Fearing, perhaps, that the point might not yet have sunk in, the editors added a closing section. Here, the terms 'militant
atheist' and 'militant atheism' cropped up no less than seven times and extra emphasis was given to the need for communist and communism to adopt an 'irreconcilable', 'implacable' and 'consciously and passionately uncompromising attitude towards religion'.

So much for modern Soviet atheism's view of itself. Now for the question of Soviet atheism's right to scientific status and whether or not it is a form of science of religion. This question has already been covered in Chapter 3 section 5, and we now move on to detail.

2. The difference with science of religion

If Soviet atheism calls itself a science — and the only true science in the area of religion, this claim must be seen in the light of Soviet ideology's concept of science. This is an esoteric concept which a priori declares itself closed to external (bourgeois) criticism.

The Soviet concept of scholarship presupposes a belief in communist ideology. If you do not share this basis, neither can you share the tenets of Soviet scientific atheism. Even the 'bourgeois' atheist and agnostic will be at a loss to recognize themselves in the dogmatic opinions of the Soviet atheist. Unlike the sociological science of religion and non-Marxist philosophical theories on god, Soviet scientific atheism makes no attempt at being an emotionless, neutral study of the phenomenon religion and of god as a question of philosophy. It is a deliberately partisan reflexion on these subjects, with an unchangeable or inflexible interpretational framework. The said social phenomenon is approached from one direction only — that of historic materialism and the philosophic questioning from dialectical materialism.
Scientific debate is sealed at the starting point and conclusion. Within, there is the possibility of marginal variation and diverse nuance. The armour admits neither new discoveries nor unforeseen questions — a contradiction of the very nature of science. At the end of the day it is the ideology, the basic philosophical option which rules whether an argument is valid and permissible, and not the intellectual creativity of the individual seeker. This then is the first reason why Soviet atheism cannot be called scientific.

Alongside its methodological limitations, there is a second reason why Soviet scientific atheism cannot be called a science of religion. Modern science of religion does not study the phenomenon of religion in order to refute or reinforce it, but out of pure scientific curiosity. Soviet atheism lacks this autonomous scientific motivation, instead there is a definite political aim, namely to combat religion, to limit its influence. Soviet science, as it touches on religion, is part of the 'ideological struggle' — an instrument of political socialization.

Just as Soviet ideologist see no problem in qualifying their atheism as 'scientific' they are equally confident in laying exclusive claim to the title of “science of religion” (religiovedenie), for their studies in this area. Naturally, as Marxists, they are careful to distance themselves from practitioners of 'bourgeois' science of religion. The Atheist Dictionary defines the matter as follows: “The theoretical-methodological side of bourgeois science of religion deserves uncompromising and sharp criticism from Marxists. However, this does not mean that Marxists may not make discriminating use of data collected by bourgeois science of religion, of some elements of its conclusions, and of its methods for empirical research.” Specifically, “Marxist science of religion involves the application of dialectical-materialistic methods to the study of religion . . . and, as such, is an integral part of scientific atheism.” Its aim is clearly stated: “to indicate realistic ways to achieve victory over religion”.5
This is indeed the raison d'être of the Soviet scientific study of religion; the motive and aim is victory (preodelenie) over religion just as a disease is studied in order to find a cure. Soviet science studies the phenomenon of religion because it is an evil, negative phenomenon — pure scientific curiosity is absent. Scientific atheism in the Soviet Union was born out of political considerations with the state as midwife. Moreover, it is not a merely private but a state-atheism. In fact, Soviet scientific atheism is every bit as much an imposition as 'typographic atheism' which prohibits the printing or writing of a capital 'G' in the word 'God'.

From the standpoint of epistemology, one is obliged to call Soviet atheism ideological, and not scientific. The epistemological status of this ideological atheism can be likened to that of another academic discipline operating from a pre-scientific belief-base, namely theology. Scientific theology and Soviet scientific atheism both aim at the rationalization of an existential choice relating to the concept of God. In both 'sciences' the researcher's basic philosophical option and his commitment to a given Weltanschauung play a decisive role in social interpretation and philosophic evaluation of that subject. Ideological atheism is a reversed theology, an anti-theology the practice of which demands absolute unbelief as pre-requisite on the part of the researcher.

This subjective standpoint, shared by theology and ideological atheism, marks a common difference from the science of religion which makes no explicit judgement on the truth of the religion or doctrine examined. It is, in principle, a neutral science. Theology and ideological atheism may both use the science of religion as an auxiliary to confirm their findings, indeed such happens regularly. Anthropological, religio-psychological, religio-historical and religio-phenomenological data are all interpreted in a manner according to the desired end: justification of Marxist—Leninist or Christian doctrine. In conclusion, it is true to say that Soviet ideological atheism is scientific — but then with the same epistemological status as theology.
That Soviet atheism shows an epistemological kinship to the religious attitude is a mere paradox. The similarity is a logical consequence of Soviet ideology's function as religion substitute, which in turn confers a religiomorphous character on that ideology as a whole. That Soviet ideology is by its nature a religion substitute is clear from its active struggle against religion. In fact, the pre-occupation with 'God' and the scientific atheist argumentation are the most fundamental religio-morphous aspects of Soviet Marxist—Leninist ideology. Not only the epistemological pre-conditions but also the concrete argumentation show an often striking resemblance to theological contention.7

But, there is an even deeper paradox. Soviet atheism's ideological and reversed-theological argumentation against religious belief justifies itself malgré lui, precisely because its methods are unscientific. The only way to refute the concept of God is tackle it on the same level — and not to brush it aside. Not being a science, religious belief cannot be refuted on scientific grounds.

Only the statement of a rock-solid disbelief over and against religion is capable of combating religion; only an ideology set in the place of religion can oust religion. Hence the expansion of atheist studies by Soviet ideologists since the 1950s; hence their raising of the ideological battle against religion above the mundane political agitation of militant atheism to the academic-propaganda level of 'scientific atheism'.

3. The organization of scientific atheism

The ideological atheism of the communist party is constitutionally anchored in Soviet society; it is the official philosophy of life taught in schools and universities. Ideological atheism's constitutionally privileged position was considerably reinforced be-
tween 1959 and 1964; propaganda and the study of atheism were re-organized, and the new structure has remained. Khrushchev’s measures relating to atheism formed the mould for its future development in the Soviet Union.

The five-year period saw the introduction of those measures decided in the July and November 1954 resolutions of the Central Committee. New impetus was also given by the 21st and 22nd Party Congresses; both wanted a faster cut-back of religion by Znanie and the Central Committee, as part of an accelerated drive to build communism. In January 1964 the Central Committee gave its agreement to an atheist programme as set out by the party’s ideological committee.

1959 saw the first organizational involvement of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in the campaign to promote atheism. Bonch-Bruyevich’s pioneering work had included the setting up of a section devoted to the history of religion and atheism in the Academy’s historical institute in 1947: now a co-ordinating board for the study of atheism was set up within the department of economic, philosophic and legal sciences of the presidium, so too were atheist sections in the institutes of philosophy, ethnography and oriental studies. Chairs of history and theory of atheism were founded at the universities of Moscow and Kiev, a trend later followed by other universities. In 1959 scientific atheism was added to the curriculum in institutes of higher education. Such was the initial lack of interest by students that since 1964 the subject has been compulsory. The total course is made up of twelve lectures.

A central Committee decree dated 5th May 1959 announced the publication of a popular scientific magazine Nauka i Religija (Science and Religion). The first number appeared the following year. The Ukraine got its own edition, Vojovnyčyj Atejist (The Militant Atheist), a title altered to Ljudyna i Svit (Man and the World), in 1965. On 15th February 1960 the Central Committee announced a new atheist textbook for higher education, Osnovy
Naučnogo Ateizma (The Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism) which was published a year later. Secondary schools were soon provided with a similar book.

All these educational innovations and publicity campaigns required a cadre of “anti-religious specialists” (specialisty-antireligiozniki) and a central regulatory body to oversee scientific research and orthodox doctrinal instruction. Such had been foreseen in the Central Committee’s 1964 report, Concerning Measures to Reinforce Atheist Education of the People. This completed the re-organization of atheist propaganda. 8

The measures announced included the setting-up of the Institute for Scientific Atheism as part of the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Its task was to be the co-ordination of matters relating to atheism in the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, the universities and bodies falling under the ministry of culture. At the same time, the Academy of Sciences was called on to be more active involved in the scientific study of atheism and the propaganda thereof. The new institute was to publish a half-yearly series under the heading Voprosy Naučnogo Ateizma (Questions of Scientific Atheism).

These would replace two existing series on the same subject: Voprosy Istorii Religii i Ateizma (Questions of the History of Religion and Atheism) published by the Historical Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and the Ežegodnik (Yearbook) of the Leningrad Museum of Atheism.

The document devoted special attention to the training of atheist cadres. From 1964 onwards, a proportion of students studying philosophy at university and history and humanities at advanced teacher training were to specialize in scientific atheism. The Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism were also to be an examination subject for everyone studying at university, medical, agricultural and teacher training colleges. Seminars on atheism and examinations on ‘atheism in practice’ were to be given at all schools in the health care, cultural education and teaching sectors.
Sciences and humanities alike were to have a stronger atheist line. Lastly, a nation-wide network of atheist study circles was to be set-up to train local cadres, in particularly: local officials, doctors, trade union officials, youth workers, journalists, all grades of school teachers, members of women’s organizations, flat and pensioner’s committees; areas where religion still had a hold being a special priority.

The latter half of the party document covered the role of artists, the media, museums, health care institutions and premises of local soviets in atheist propaganda. Film, literature, the stage and graphic arts were all to create more works with an atheist theme. More brochures and books were to be published for the benefit of specific religious groupings and social categories. More atheist subjects were to dealt with in periodicals like *Questions of Philosophy, The Agitator, Knowledge is Power, Health, Nature*, and *The Female Kolchoz Worker*. Radio and television were to broadcast regular programmes on atheism. Regional museums, planetariums and mobile exhibitions were to be involved. Hospitals, maternity and infant care clinics, and sanitoriums were to give more atheist counselling. Introduction of the so-named a-religious, socialist ceremonies for naming the new-born, issuing the first passport and marriage, were to be speeded up. Civil registry officials, trade unionists and ethnographers were to co-operate in designing attractive ceremonies. Where possible, ‘palaces of happiness’ were to be built to this end.

Finally the party called for intensified anti-religious work among the young, in and out of school: extra atheist content in regular lessons; the setting up of atheist sections in youth clubs; the organizing of excursions, film evenings and plays with an anti-religious theme. Moreover, regulations prohibiting the clergy from mixing with the young and forbidding parental duress in religious observance were to be more stringently observed.

Thus far the summary of new measures listed in this communist party document. The thoroughness is striking: each and every
institution in society — from the Academy of Sciences to maternity clinics — are given a list of atheist missionary tasks, or as the official jargon has it, “the formation of atheist consciousness among the people”. Whether they all achieve their goals in another matter. Subsequent party statements and press articles are rife with complaints against neglect or half-heartedness in the atheist propaganda campaign by given bodies or in a given area but, more on this later.

Far reaching and thorough though it might have been in listing institutions, the 1964 document omits the largest Soviet organization of all. This organization, proudly considering itself “the most effective school for atheism”, is the Soviet military. Presumably the military was not included because its programme of atheist education was taken for granted; in the Soviet armed forces ideological indoctrination has long since eradicated the boarder dividing individuality from collectivism. The degree of indoctrination can be judged from the article _Ateistitcheskoe Vospitanie Voinov_ (Atheist Education of Soldiers) in a magazine for military cadres. Alongside the general requirement for atheist propaganda in Soviet society as a whole, there is a special reason for combating religion in the armed forces lying in: “the negative influence of religious prejudices on the formation of the political morale and psychological qualities needed in battle . . . These prejudices involve ideas of abstract pacifism, religious humanism, unnatural love of the enemy, lack of resistance to evil, the anti-patriotic nature of the doctrine of a heavenly fatherland and the concept of military service as evil.”

The motivation of atheist propaganda in the armed forces clearly illustrates the practical-political aims of that propaganda. Religion is a stumbling block preventing government from making state and fatherland the highest criteria in the citizen’s scale of ethical values. This practical approach is central to atheist propaganda. Hence the 1964 package gave priority to the organizational linking of theoretical study and practical propaganda.
of atheism in the Institute for Scientific Atheism. The aim of broad scientific apparatus set up by the Academy and universities was to extend beyond the autonomous field of purely scientific research to active propaganda of atheism. All this helps explain L.F. Ilyichev’s criticism of the scientific community in 1964: he accused them of “academicism”, of “flight into the depths of the past and to exotic locales: writing reams on the religions of Africa, Australia and the Pacific but producing little in the way of solid studies on the state of religion in the Soviet Union”.

4. Unity of school and family

In the Soviet view, just as the inter-relation of science and propaganda goes without saying, so does that twixt school and family when it comes to atheist education. Religious education is forbidden in the Soviet Union, only seminarists may be so instructed and then only in designated premises. The clergy are not allowed to give private instruction to citizens whose only option is to learn of religion during religious services. However, parents are permitted to give their children religious instruction; in practice this does not mean freedom from interference.

The most important argument against religious instruction in the home is the link between education in the family and at school. At school Soviet children receive communist-ideological training: it would be illogical for them to get a contradictory philosophical message at home. And, according to Soviet educationalists, it is psychologically irresponsible to confuse a child with on the one hand scientific communism and on the other unscientific religion. To do so could result in a spiritual split (dvoedušie, razdvoennost’ soznania) and consequent psychological damage to the growing child: parents should be aware of their
responsibility in this respect, and constitutional freedom of
religion is no excuse for religious instruction.

Here we see a clear and fundamental tension between the
letter and spirit of the Soviet constitution. Hardly surprisingly,
the problem is solved to the advantage of the ideological spirit
of the law as shown in the catechism-like booklet *Religija i Zakon*
(Religion and the Law), published in 1975: “It is quite true
that the law does not forbid parents to give their children religious
instruction. But what sort of upbringing is it when certain religious
parents give their children the idea that everything has a divine
originate as opposed to the real scientific knowledge they receive
at school? This creates a split leading to spiritual, inner confusion
and serious damage during the development of human personality.
Hence the importance of working systematically to clarify to the
people the duty and responsibility of parents in bringing up
their children”.12

Government guidelines and legislation on education treat as
obvious parents’ moral obligation to bring up their children
as atheists. The Marriage and Family Codex of the RSFSR states
that “parents must bring up their children in the spirit of the
moral codex of the builder of communism”. And, the civil wedding
ceremony makes it quite clear that the family functions as a cell
of communist education.13 This very point of unity between
family and school, i.e. the subjection of one to the other, was
also aimed at in the 1984 educational reforms. Paragraph 13 of
the new school law formulated the atheist aims of education
as follows: “In education it is important that all subjects, both in
the social and in the natural sciences, cultivate solid materialistic
ideas and atheist insight among pupils, the ability to interpret
natural and social phenomena correctly and to function in
accordance with the principles of our *Weltanschauung*.”14 That
upbringing in the parental home ought not to diverge from said
aims was clear from party leader Chernenko’s speech recom-
mending the law to the plenary session of the Central Committee
in April 1984. He emphasized that schools should impart the Marxist—Leninist Weltanschauung to their pupils and "cultivate a lasting immunity against alien concepts and morals. And no different lesson may be taught within the family . . . No good can be expected of learning one thing at school and another at home." 

Part of Soviet teachers' job description is to involve indifferent or unwilling parents in the atheist education of their children. Special manuals lay down precisely and methodically how they should go about it. For a start, teachers are to neutralize the influence of religious parents. Next, they must try to win over those parents to a loyal position vis-a-vis atheist education at school. And, as a final stage, the parents themselves are to converted to atheism via what the manual calls "the individual approach", a method demanding much in the way of tact, patience and psychological insight. The teacher needs to reconnoitre deep into family territory, into what parents think, into their socio-behavioural patterns. Relevant information comes via the child, for instance by having him or her write a composition on family matters or on a religious theme, by asking questions in class which expose the parents' interests, by talking directly with the child and by involving non-believers in the family. Lastly, the teacher is instructed to involve the child in providing religious parents or grandparents with information on atheism. This can be done by supplying literature and natural-scientific works with an anti-religious bent to be read at home and touching on themes for discussions on religion. Should a teacher be convinced of 'religious compulsion' (as unrepentant religious education is called) by parents, it becomes his duty to inform the relevant authorities.

Breaching the integrity of the family to promote atheist propaganda among children displays realism on the part of government. The Soviet authorities' avowed intention of combating religious thought and values targets the very roots. Once school, media
and church are removed from the picture only the family remains as bringer of religious knowledge and values to the young within Soviet society. Statist Soviet ideology — of which atheism is an integral part — is obliged to invade the last refuge of the citizen's own values, the last bulwark against the spiritual monopoly of the state.

5. Social control

Social control is an important means of promoting atheism in society. This control is already strongly present in the collectivist Soviet society. But it is further stimulated when aimed at religious life by means of the many group sessions Soviet citizens must attend in the workplace or as part of the educational system. Groups discuss the 'anti-social' behaviour of fellow members who are subject to 'comradely verdicts'. Only rarely does this come from the group as a whole, mostly the initiative comes from above, from the party members or Komsomol cadres who usually form the leadership of the collective. Indeed, within the party and Komsomol, social conduct is especially closely monitored by all concerned; social control does not really apply here, it is replaced by a more stringent, deeper group pressure. A taint of religion in the life of party and Komsomol members is condemned as a direct breach of the group code. The statutes of both organizations embrace "active struggle against religious prejudices and other remnants of the past" among their aims. Such is the atmosphere in party and youth movement that it is shameful for members to attend a church service or wear crosses; so to do is grounds for public criticism and, depending on the gravity of the offence, sanctions involving the career. Controls within the Communist cadre groups also extend to members'
family and friends: a party leader can be expelled because his son-in-law sings in a church choir.17 Thus the group control medium works in two directions — towards members and non-members. Lenin was unequivocal in stating that a party member could not be a religious believer and the slogan “every Komsomoler a militant atheist” is as relevant as ever.18

Given that the smaller the community the more effective the social control and the traditional strength of religion in the countryside, considerable effort goes into building up ‘atheist public opinion’ (ateisticheskoe obščestvennoe mnenie) in rural communities, in kolchozes, sovchozes and in villages. As is cryptically formulated: “A well formed atheist public opinion can stimulate religious believers to active social and cultural work and involve them in the interests of socialist collectives”19

Soviet ideological literature regularly mentions — and not without pride — the achievement of mass-atheism in the Soviet Union. In so doing it is put on record that religion has all but ceased to multiply via organized channels thanks to the separation of church and state, though it continues to flourish along individual routes. Hence the call for the anti-religious struggle to be carried to the believer himself — the previously mentioned ‘individual approach’. Not that this indicates recognition of the individual, under the paradoxical semantic of Soviet ideology this means intensified social pressure on him. It is a refined method of collectivizing the individual believer into the corral of mass-atheism.

The modern school of atheist education increasingly calls for “the individual elaboration of the believer” as it is also called. The first extensive article in favour came from one of Khrushchev’s chief party ideologists, L.F. Ilyichev, in the party organ, Kom- munist.20 The individual approach requires that the propagandists can talk with authority on the target’s religion rather than religion in general. In the first place this demands a specialized study of the religion in question taking regional variations into account. Se-
condly, the individual approach calls for psychological technique: injured sensibilities must be avoided as counter-productive — strengthening resistance and destroying the credibility of the propagandist. Belief, according to Ilyichev, is less a rational-theoretical matter than one of emotion, having a primary function in a sense of emotional well-being. Hence, in combating religion, not only must the scriptures be scientifically debunked but the individual's emotions also need working on — an area which Ilyichev says demands “an infinitely subtler approach”. Atheist propaganda is more than transferring knowledge, it is a matter of educational work.

The intensity of Soviet atheist propaganda, the social pressure and invasion of private life can only be explained in terms of its aim. Within the general aim of political socialization of the citizen and his total integration into the ideological monoculture this specific aim is designated as training the citizen to have an “atheist consciousness” (ateističeskoe soznanie). This differs from “areligious consciousness” (bezreligioznoe soznanie) which is merely negative — the absence of belief in the supernatural and far from being active atheist commitment. Areligious consciousness is seen as typical of modern Western capitalist societies where many have also broken with religion: it springs from scepticism, agnosticism or indifference. Atheist consciousness, in contrast, is based on philosophic materialism, it is a conviction involving social and political consequences. The attitude resulting from atheist consciousness is designated “atheisticity” (ateističnost’), which again differs from unbelief, lack of religion (bezreligioznost’, nereligioznost’). The Atheist Dictionary provides a definition: “the presence in the individual of a certain totality of atheist knowledge and insight, conviction in that truth, willingness to bear witness to their knowledge and insight, adoption of a resolute atheist position in relevant situations, the purposeful carrying out of atheist work and the bringing up of children in the atheist spirit.”21
In conclusion one can state that the system of atheist education and training set up in the 1960s is perfectly organized — on paper. Its less than perfect performance in practice is borne out by periodic complaints in the Party about "weakening of atheist work"; these involve both slow execution of decisions and the growth of a tolerant attitude to religion. The last Central Committee decree specially devoted to atheism (16th July 1971) particularly criticized the fact that "some publications, films and television programmes use religious rites and church ceremonies without any clear reason. It even occurs that certain communists and komsomol members distance themselves from the struggle against religious prejudices and take part in religious services." During the 1970s and early 1980s similar complaints were a regular feature in press and party literature. At the plenary session of the central committee in June 1983, Chernenko, at that time speaking for and on behalf of Party leader Andropov, found it necessary to warn against "god-seeking' themes creeping into literature". His address continued in the same tone: "ideological work among such a specific group as believers may not be weakened. A section of the people and — let us be honest — not such a small section, is still influenced by religion." On year later, in December 1984, Mikhail Gorbachev, at that time speaking for and on behalf of Party leader Chernenko, was not slow to pick up the thread: he stated the importance of atheist education, using the expression, "patriotic and atheist education" to sum up, in his own manner, the link between statism and atheism.

This sort of criticism, and the frequency with which it crops up, points to what has been called a "religious renaissance" in the Soviet Union. The term is overdone. There is a definite and growing interest among the intelligentsia for the phenomenon of religion and for the Russian Orthodox Church. But, this interest is often cultural in nature, and among the young it is something of a fad. Even so, at the very least it indicates an attitude which is anything but militant towards religion among the Soviet people.
— and that says little for the effectiveness of a half-century's worth of atheist propaganda. A better description than religious renaissance would be "a-atheism", a disinterest in the confessional atheism of Soviet ideology.

The Communist Party's criticism of atheist propaganda in practice not only indicates the occasional gap between theory and execution, it also shows undiminished determination to achieve the goals of the Party's long term atheist programme. One only needs consider the flood of atheist literature in recent years to realize that atheist propaganda is as alive and kicking as ever in the Soviet Union. This is no thanks to the personal unbridled commitment of professional antireligiozniki, ideologists, philosophers and propagandists; it is because of objective imperative requiring the preservation of this ideological segment: without it the ideology would forfeit integrity as Weltanschauung.

6. The literature of atheism

Since the Academy of Sciences began to deal with atheism as a scientific subject in the 1950s, and since it became a compulsory subject at school in the 1960s, much has been published in the Soviet Union on the subject of god, church and religion. This specialist literature of atheism consists of manuals and reference works, school books, a popular scientific monthly, a scientific series appearing every six months and a legion of monographs and brochures. Style differs: it may be academic, or didactic, it may smack of agitation, but the basis is apologetic — the aim is to defend disbelief.

In measuring the quality of specialist atheist literature one must begin with the epistemological status of Soviet atheism. In chapters 3 and 5, sections 5 and 2 respectively, this status
was compared to that of theology. Despite seeing itself as an objective science dealing with religion, ideological atheism is in fact a faith. It is scientific only in as far as it is a methodical reflexion on and a rational formulation of a weltanschaulich choice against the concept of god; similarly, theology is a scientific consideration of an existential acceptance of that same concept. At the risk of repetition, ideological atheism is inverted theology, neither in the empirical nor in the philosophical sense does this make said atheism a science of religion.

Putting Soviet atheism in this perspective makes Soviet atheist literature a no less serious subject for social scientists or scientists of religion. For many years the Western academic has paid little attention to this literature: only recently has a systematic study of Soviet atheist literature appeared, the work of James Thrower. Thrower’s Marxist-Leninist ‘Scientific Atheism’ is a thorough analysis of modern Soviet atheism. However, he sees it as a form of science of religion, albeit a bad one. From the arguments already advanced it has become clear that Soviet atheism cannot be so designated. To call Soviet atheism a science of religion ignores its ideological conditioning, which is not the same as political support by the state for atheism. On the latter, the preface to Thrower’s book states quite correctly that political support is no argument against the scientific status of the particular variety of atheism. But ideological conditioning goes beyond political support. In other words, the Soviet governments support for atheism expresses itself as an ideological magisterium — giving guidelines for the study of religion. A science based on an external authority is no science, and indeed, Thrower puts the scientific status of Soviet atheism in this perspective both by criticism of its manner of argument and generalization and, strikingly, by surrounding the term ‘scientific atheism’ in inverted commas throughout his book.

Thrower’s standard work makes it unnecessary to analyse modern Soviet specialist atheist literature here. The remarks
on the quality of that literature which follow are confined to evaluation of the form in which the doctrine is presented — to a characteristic of what can called the intellectual flavour of the whole. At the outset one has to acknowledge that in the seventy years of its existence Soviet atheism has evolved from vulgar abuse of religion to a specialized study of the phenomenon. In itself the upgrading of atheist propaganda to academic discipline is already a sign of taking the problems of religion seriously and an implicit abandonment of Marxist optimism on its withering away.

A second development concerns the broader approach to religion. For many years Soviet atheism confined its attack to the historical explanation of religion — description of its origins its political development and decline. There was also parallel description of the rise, oppression and final victory of atheism in its historical completion as Marxist—Leninist atheism. This is still the fixed pattern for atheist textbooks. And yet differing accents are possible within this fixed historical-materialistic interpretational framework. These have led to an important broadening of themes in atheist propaganda: the cultural-anthropological theme (functions of rites), the existential theme (the so-called questions of life) and the aesthetic theme (the significance of religious art).

Remarkable in current atheist studies is the use of sociological study methods to measure the degree of religiousness per area and the effect of atheist propaganda. As with other sociological studies in the Soviet Union, these studies are conducted locally and do not provide a nationwide overview of religion's role in society. Even so, these empirical data have encouraged caution in predictions of the end of religion in a communist society. This is not stated in so many words but in complaints about the stubborn survival of religious traditions in given areas, in referring to lack of interest in atheist instruction and — above all — in encouragement of more effective anti-religious propaganda,
The shift in themes and methods in modern atheist literature in no way indicates a change in the form of Soviet atheism. As previously stated, "scientific atheism" sees no breach in principles with pre-war militant atheism. Constant reference is made to the classics of that period; and even more eloquent is the continued use of the same old arguments and methods. In particular this involves rationalistic bible criticism and physics based arguments against god. Soviet atheists and Christian fundamentalists have that much in common that the former use biblical inconsistencies to prove scripture scientifically null and void and the latter cite the same source to refute the theory of evolution.

Most remarkable remain the natural-scientific arguments against belief in god. During the militant period holy water was put under the microscope to show that it was no different to and contained the same bacteria as common-or-garden H₂O. The corpses of saints were exhumed to demonstrate that they too were subject to corruption. Scientific tests and tricks were used to recreate miracles. The efficacy of artificial fertilizer was solemnly demonstrated to be greater than that of a priestly blessing in ensuring a good harvest. The crowning empirical proof from the current period of scientific atheism must surely be the failure of Soviet astronauts to encounter god in space. Albeit that far from all members of the Soviet community of scientific atheists are equally comfortable with this school of pseudo argumentation, their specialist literature has yet to refute Yuri Gagarin’s findings. Indeed, frequent variations on this cosmological proof of the non-existence of god are in current use.

The medico-scientific arguments against religion also continue in use. There is, for example, a study which gives statistics, drawn from two parishes between 1969 and 1973, proving that child baptism is harmful to physical and psychological development: baptised children are shown to be 2.8 times more liable to acute bronchial complaints, 5.7 times more liable to serious gastric
upsets, 9.5 times more liable to catch pneumonia and 2.3 times more liable to illness in general. The psychological drawback came from the involuntary nature of baptism. The author of the study, a doctor, was convinced of his case and strongly disagreed with fellow practitioners who believed the necessity of studying the consequences of baptism to have been overtaken by improved standards of hygiene. For this very reason he himself had conducted his research in an hygienic environment. The article ended with a plea for "reinforced scientific — in particular medical — atheist propaganda".26

Despite such scientifically dubious œuvres, as previously noted, the standards of atheist literature have noticeably improved. In the first place this improvement is seen in Soviet atheist reference works — *The Atheist Dictionary* (1983), and *The Handbook of the Atheist* (1981).27 The first of these has also appeared in abridged form as *The Pocket Dictionary of Atheism*.28 These books contain a treasure trove of factual information on world religions, sects, theological trends, religious thinkers, confessional politics and religious culture. Naturally, presentation of the facts occurs within an ideological framework, but the importance of such works goes beyond the solid basis they provide for atheist propaganda: in a society where any and all "positive" religious literature is forbidden, they offer a loophole to those with an interest in religious matters. Generally speaking, the Soviet citizen has become skilled in reading between and behind the lines of official literature on such undesirable phenomena as religion and non-Marxist philosophy. Given the universal apathy, even revulsion, of the Soviet intelligentsia towards ideological party literature, the relative interest in books criticizing non-communist philosophies can only be explained if these are indeed read for a purpose opposite to that intended. And so, the university handbook for lectures on atheism, *History and Theory of Atheism* often remains on the owner’s bookshelf after graduation, unlike *The Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*. As a matter of fact,
the handbook, which first appeared in 1974, is also an example of the less cramped school of atheist propaganda.\textsuperscript{29}

The collected articles published twice yearly since 1966 under the title \textit{Questions of Scientific Atheism} are also notable for their more businesslike tone. The same is true to an even greater extent in the Academy of Science's \textit{The Religions of the World}, a series of yearbooks launched in 1982.\textsuperscript{30} The introduction to the first volume emphasized the complexity of religion as phenomenon and its "efforts for renewal and adjustment to modern science". And this is the main editorial target, to be fought with "well argumented scientific criticism". As for the history of religion, the editors have this to say: "its objective study is incompatible with either glossing over or over emphasizing its darker side – or with an empassioned, one-sided elucidation of given episodes and personages." But, despite fine words about contributions to the science of religion (\textit{religiovedenie}) and authors as religious scientists (\textit{specialisty-religiovedy}), the end goal is stated as "the atheist education of the masses of the people". In other words, \textit{specialisty-religiovedy} pass on theoretical knowledge to the more practically oriented \textit{specialisty-antireligiozniki}.

Another example of the altered tone of modern Soviet atheism is the Soviet \textit{Philosophic Encyclopedia} published in 1970. Definitions of terms like theology, theodicee, salvation, lot, death, eschatology and incarnation omit the usual historical and sociological irrelevancies on alienation and manipulation. Such remarks remain only by general concepts such as religion and belief. P. Ehlen makes mention of this change: "In the Philosophical Encyclopedia we find for the first time in an official publication a serious attempt to plumb christianity's own understanding of itself".\textsuperscript{31}

Despite the change of tone in specialist Soviet atheist literature Soviet atheism admits no serious differences of opinion, no scepticism vis-a-vis the monocausal explanatory theory of historical materialism. Each and every book repeats the old truths and
is a variation on the same theme, a re-establishment of principles.

If there are no clashes within the circle of scientific atheists then there is even less likelihood of discussion with theologians or agnostics. Not even "bourgeois" atheists are invited to symposia or guest lectures. The avoidance of confrontation with those who think differently, the fear of direct challenge, must surely indicate an unvoiced realization that the doctrine is not up to it; this is an implicit recognition of the weakness of ideological atheism. If it were possible to prove itself in open debate, on an equal intellectual footing, with opponents or representatives of other and differing schools of atheism, this could only make atheist propaganda more inspiring. But that would mean a shift of intention from propaganda to study, opening of the way to philosophic pluralism. And so atheist propaganda remains at a level of which the priest Dimitri Dudko said: "If we had not met atheism as it appears in this country perhaps we might have hesitated for a long time before becoming believers. Just look at what was written against God before the revolution! If atheism had continued in the pre-revolutionary way we might never have believed again. But now we have experienced atheism in all its glory, we are drawn strongly to God." Not one single professional atheist scientist in the Soviet Union would refute another of his statements, that "it is striking that nearly everyone knows that every bookshop has something on atheism, but nobody is interested in those books. But just imagine the opposite, imagine that there was suddenly a shop where you could get the gospel, the bible and all manner of religious books. There would be such a queue outside that there would never be enough books, however many they printed."32 Father Dudko was banned from preaching in 1974 for attempting a dialogue with atheism.

More Soviet anti-religious literature is published than ever before and demand is in direct desproportion to production. That, however, is not the only paradox of the current situation of atheism in the Soviet Union: the people's interest in and
cultural thirst for things religious is greater by far than it would have been without the propaganda overkill the government uses to combat religion. And, given the dearth of alternative sources, this has led to a degree of interest in the better anti-religious literature, not for what it preaches — but for that which it preaches against.

7. Atheism and the *perestrojka* of Soviet society

Under Party leader Mikhail Gorbachev the Soviet Union has taken a turn toward enlightenment, that much is unmistakable. Soviet society is becoming more open and more tolerant, self-critical and culturally pluriform. Despite these changes for the better Soviet attitudes have, as yet, remained remarkably constant towards religion. This is not to say that positive developments can be ruled out in the future. But, for the present, we must work on the basis of measures taken and statements made by the new leadership during its first two years. The conclusion is ambivalent, not so much because of the few changes in religious legislation but because of the Soviet government’s dual approach to religion. On the one hand there is political legislation and administrative regulation and on the other the ideological attitude in the media and schools. If the former are relaxed, the level of ideological anti-religious propaganda can be maintained or even heightened.

The increasingly lively Soviet press under Gorbachev has not lessened its emphasis on the need for atheist propaganda and struggle against “religious phenomena”. Atheist propaganda is criticised for ineffectiveness, not that this is new, such criticism is as old as its object and has become a permanent feature of the whole. Appeals and complaints are now couched in the style
of the times and there is a new, more businesslike, terminology. Expressions like "restructuring", "acceleration", "new approach" and "mobilising the human factor" have become the currency of atheist literature. It seems clear that, in line with the general perestrojka in Soviet society, anti-religious propaganda is to be up-dated and streamlined. A Pravda article on 13th September 1985 made a lengthy call for just such an approach. The results of the struggle against "religious ideology" were directly linked to accelerated socio-economic development. Inertia and apathy towards atheism were to be overcome. The so-called spontaneous or natural atheists among the a-religious population were to jettison their indifferentism in the field of Weltanschauung and become active propagandists. The modernized atheist propaganda would have to take account of new realities: higher intellectual level of believers, increased cultural appreciation for religion and the tendency to see religion as compatible with and serving the socialist/patriotic cause. The article sees the necessity and relevance of more effective atheist propaganda as increasingly urgent with the approach of the thousandth anniversary of Russia’s conversion to christianity in 1988: "offensive counter-propaganda" by atheists is needed against "militant clerical" elements abroad using the jubilee as an anti-Soviet weapon. Pravda gave more detailed guidelines for this campaign: on the one hand realistic advice on the exploitation of increased demand for things spiritual — and on the other a nonsensical linking of the achievement of party economic goals and new-look, streamlined atheist propaganda. Even so, the economic link is interesting in that it relates to the politics of Mikhail Gorbachev — as such, the article can be seen as thumbnail policy sketch of atheist propaganda under the new party leader.33

Confirmation comes from other developments in the field. At a congress for social scientists held in Moscow in September 1986. Yegor Ligachev, number two in the Soviet leadership, used businesslike language to tell Soviet educators and sociologists
their role in atheist education, in particular as regards young people in higher education. On 28th September (a Sunday) *Pravda* followed up the congress by devoting its main article to atheist education, calling once more for an offensive approach and special attention of those aesthetic and ethical aspects of religion so attractive to the young. The article also criticised “flirtation with god” (denoted by the derogatory “little god”, *bożenka*), in particular by writers, which “revived the old god-seeking ideas”.34

In recent years this has become an oft repeated warning. And not only in specialist atheist literature but also, more interestingly, in the national press. The tendency of modern Russian writers, particularly the popular ‘village’ school to attribute Soviet society’s moral slide to the loss of religious values — albeit not in so many words — is marked by official reprimands and individual attacks by ideological conservatives. So, on 7th February 1987, *Pravda* led with an article on “restructuring and renewing of Soviet morals”, continuing that solutions should not be sought in “talk of religious morality”.35 Such warnings are signs of a more than mere incidental disturbance as witnessed by Feliks Kuznetsov’s impassioned defence of Astafyev, Aytmatov and Bykov at the plenary board meeting of the writer’s union in late April 1987. The meeting dealt with the evolvement of *glasnost’* in the year following the innovative 1986 writer’s congress. Some, like the editors of *Komsomol’skaja Pravda* had already expressed concern that “it is an actual fact that current literature shows a tendency towards god-building, restoration of biblical morality and admiration for religion in our history”. The article named the three writers listed above, accusing them of “faults in the area of *Weltanschauung*”, involving “god-seeking, god-building and flirting with god”. However, Kuznetsov calls suchlike accusations “a more than clear expression of dogmatism and vulgarization in the approach to literature”, in that the writers named “are not seeking god but conscience, virtue and honour”.36 A week
later *Literaturnaja Gazeta* sprang once more in the breach for these “our greatest writers”, defending them against “dogmatic accusations of deviation from atheism”. The weekly quoted approvingly from an article entitled “The new godseeking and the old dogmas” by A. Nuykin in the May edition of *Novyj Mir*. Nuykin defended atheism with confidence but rejected the old dogmatic approach.

Party leader Gorbachev has himself referred to the need for atheist propaganda and the struggle against religion on various occasions. At the 27th Party Congress in February 1986 he was brief but to the point on the reactivation of propaganda: “Stagnation is simply unacceptable in the entire sphere of ideological, political, moral and atheist education”. He went on to warn against painting “the religious remnants from the past in idyllic colours”. Clearly he had a linkage of religion and nationalism in mind. During a visit to Uzbekistan in November 1986 he called for “energetic and uncompromising combating of religious phenomena”. Party and government repeated this appeal in the aftermath of nationalist unrest in Kazakhstan the following month.

The Communist Party’s new programme adopted under Gorbachev devotes a single paragraph to atheism; it is both shorter and more succinct than in the preceding programme. The expression “atheist education” replaces “atheist propaganda”. This up-dated terminology is in line with an earlier terminological adjustment dating from 1977 when “atheist propaganda” ousted “anti-religious propaganda”. “Education” is not only more businesslike than “propaganda”, it also goes further: it points to an obvious integration of atheism in the educational process and is thus more directly connected to the personal life of the (young) Soviet citizen. This is also clear from the fact that the party programme mentions a new element in atheist education, namely “spreading wide the new Soviet traditions and customs”. This refers to the Soviet civil equivalents for church weddings and
baptism, "socialist rites" — as the jargon calls them — deserving ever wider employment in the educational process aimed at patriotism and citizenship.

At the April 1987 Komsomol congress the organization's chairman, Mironenko, had this to say on the theme of religion: "It is necessary to return to the offensive in the struggle against religious Weltanschauung. Now more than ever it is important to overcome petit-bourgeois neutralist attitudes to religion, the snobbish and trendy following of mystique, and apathy towards atheism — the spiritual value of socialism."  

Clearly, the Soviet government attitude towards religion (i.e. religious Weltanschauung and religious education) has not changed in principle under the dynamic leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. The general restructuring of Soviet society seems to have boosted atheist propaganda out of the slough into which it had fallen under Brezhnev. As Pravda put it on 23rd January 1987: "The system of atheist propaganda lags hopelessly behind life today and requires basic restructuring." The Soviet government's ongoing atheist stance is in no way out of line with the many changes in other areas of Soviet society. Atheist propaganda was a political imperative for survival of the ideological Soviet state; and the greater the degree of economic and cultural liberalization, the greater seems the imperative. Here is the paradox of the Gorbachev reforms: increased freedoms in economic and cultural spheres have a political price in the form of a reinforced ideological line elsewhere. The object is to avoid a stampede which might topple the edifice of state.

Hence, churches in the Soviet Union have no media access and when dealing with church and religion, the media sticks to its traditional rejection of religion — even when they write positively about the culture of the Russian Orthodox Church. In March 1987 the chairman of the Soviet journalist's union told his profession's national congress that whatever criticism or self-criticism, the press must continue the struggle against
“nationalism, religion, pacifism and cosmopolitanism”, four traditional bourgeois sins whose propaganda is forbidden. The Soviet Union’s remarkable proposal at the third Helsinki follow-up conference in Vienna (March 1987) that the propaganda of atheism be included in the U.N. declaration of human rights has to be seen in the same light. The incident is noteworthy not so much because of the Soviets’ failure to suggest equal freedom for religious propaganda, but because this archetypal Soviet ideological proposal clashes with the more business-like approach to human rights under Gorbachev. Even so, it was a continuation of an earlier attempt during the 1950s to gain atheism international cachet when, as member of the UN committee pondering the definition of religious freedom, the Soviet Union made considerable efforts to have atheism categorized as a protected philosophy of life — enjoying equal status with religious equivalents but clearly separate from agnosticism which the Soviet delegation explicitly wanted to deny similar protection.

In the Soviet Union atheist propaganda is taken seriously to such a degree that its opposite — theist propaganda, i.e. public religious education — is actually illegal. Such has been the situation since 1929, a situation confirmed by a new law in 1986. The law on private work, effective as from May 1987, permitted private tuition with the exception of subjects not found in official curricula – hence also religious instruction and theology. As already mentioned, church and believers are denied media access on principle. However, in 1987 an exception was made, albeit an irrelevancy: in March 1987 Golos Rodiny, (The Voice of the Fatherland), a magazine for Russians domiciled abroad interviewed metropolitan Sergi of Odessa on the millennium of Russian Orthodoxy. The article deals with the significance of the church’s role in Russian history and in the creation of Russian culture and mentions the national church council to be held in June 1988. The irrelevance to glasnost’ lies in the
fact that it is written for Russians abroad and in the shrill contrast with the avalanche of anti-millennium literature inside the Soviet Union. The same applies to the Moscow Patriarchate’s new (January 1987) multi-lingual monthly information bulletin, *Moskovskij Cerkovnyi Vestnik* (Moscow Church Messenger). Russian, English, German, French, Spanish and Arabic editions provide information on the Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish and Protestant communities in the Soviet Union. Content and style are that of a tourist hand-out. The magazine’s colour photos are quite magnificent.

Whether or not the salutary openness, currently soothing away the suffocating censorship, will eventually be applied to the reporting of church and religious affairs does not — in light of the aforegoing — appear imminent. But there is the very tiniest glimmer of hope. On 4th February 1987 *Literaturnaja Gazeta* carried an interview with Cardinal Glemp of Poland. More interesting and important than content — platitudes on the struggle for peace — were the journalist’s introductory remarks. The actual significance of the Catholic church in Poland was dealt with in a neutral, objective fashion, quite free of the usual pejorative vocabulary. In the Soviet context, such a businesslike approach is new.45

Among details which the good will of the observer may label as positive is the ideological novelty of printing the word “god” upper case “G”. God with a capital “G” appeared in Chingiz Aytmatov’s story *Placha* (The Scaffold), in the June 1986 edition of *Novyj Mir*: a thing of little consequence for a Western atheist, but a major step in the Soviet context where typographic or orthographic atheism was a matter of principle.

So much for recent developments in Soviet atheist propaganda. The other aspect of Soviet religious policy — legislation covering the churches — is the scene of a more important process of change. Gorbachev’s aim of giving Soviet society more certainty under the law has brought about less arbitrary application against the
churches. A change in the law announced in January 1986 was designed to broaden the legal base of the churches and the conditions of employment for clergy. The churches, or “religious associations” in Soviet legalese, have become legal entities and are now in a position to own their own premises (previously these had been rented from the state). Children of ten and over are now allowed to take part in services and sing in choirs. The clergy (“servants of the cults”) may “perform rites” outside their parishes and, in exceptional cases, in private houses. These changes in the law have yet to appear in any official publication. The only announcement has been in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* and then in somewhat obscure formulation. As with so many laws in the Soviet Union, all rests on actual interpretation by civil servants; but if, as Gorbachev wants, the Soviet government is to abide by the letter of its laws, and to publish them so that all citizens and/or believers know where they are — then this is a positive development.

Permission for the Russian Orthodox Church to hold a national council in its thousandth year represents another positive development. In his announcement, Metropolitan Sergi of Odessa, linked the council with a new church statute (replacing that dating from 1945 and unfavourably amended under Khrushchev). Yet another shaft of light is provided by permission for churches in the Soviet Union to print one hundred thousand bibles. Whilst this will no where near meet religious and cultural demands and these bibles will not go on public sale, the figure is far greater than any previous edition printed mainly for use in atheist propaganda. But, the Soviet government’s absolute control in this matter only serves to highlight the anomaly of an atheist political executive laying down just how many religious books may be printed. Indeed, the very existence of legislation on religion accords ill with the tenets of a secularized state. Removal of this anomaly would go some way to making the Soviet Union a modern state: however, such a step seems unlikely, even under Gorbachev.
A judgement on Gorbachev’s religious policy is premature. Although until now Soviet laws on church activities have not been changed fundamentally, there is the general feeling that real reforms are to come. The growing intellectual and cultural freedom in contemporary Soviet society, will surely result in greater religious freedom. The thousandth anniversary of Russian Orthodoxy may prove to be a turning point, despite the efforts of atheist propaganda.

8. Atheism and the millennium of Christianity in Russia

Atheistic literature has always been plentiful in the Soviet Union. Since 1982 however, in addition to the “normal” atheistic literature there has been an extra stream of books and articles provoked by the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church. This anti-Orthodox literature cannot be considered to be intended as a balance for the propaganda of the Russian Orthodox Church, because this does not exist, or at least not within the Soviet Union. The only book that the patriarchate of Moscow, up to now, has issued in connection with the millennium is a book written in German, printed in Switzerland and translated into English and French. We shall return to this later. Nevertheless, Soviet books frequently refer to the propaganda of the Russian Orthodox Church. Reference is made in fact to the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, but this is not available to the Soviet citizen.

The second reason that is often given is that propaganda from abroad seizes on the millennium in order to give the “religious ideology” in the Soviet Union an extra boost. The material appearing in the West, however, is intended for the Western public and, once again, this cannot be obtained by interested Soviet readers, let alone the public at large.
The only remaining explanation of the extra injection of atheistic literature in the Soviet Union must be: to offer a balance to the spontaneous interest of the Russian people for their own church and church history. But atheist propaganda cannot admit openly that this spontaneous interest exists and is so strong, after seventy years of atheist propaganda monopoly in press and education. Propaganda should have to admit its own failure not so much in the field of methodology but in the understanding of the religious phenomenon as such. Atheist propaganda therefore refers to foreign factors and to the alleged ideological activities of the church in the Soviet Union itself.

The anti-Orthodox literature which has appeared in recent years in connection with the millennium of the Russian Church, can be divided into three categories: a) historiographical works, b) atheistic art criticism and c) publications of the Russian religious critics of the 19th century. We shall now give a review of that literature from the period 1982-1988, that is to say from the year that the first book with a reference to the millennium appeared, up to the works announced for the year 1988 in the weekly catalogue *Novye Knigi*, before May 1987. We shall restrict ourselves to books, and therefore not mention articles appearing in the monthly *Nauka i Religija* (Science and Religion), in the annual collection *Argumenty* (Arguments), and in the magazine *Argumenty i fakty* (Arguments and Facts). The latter two periodicals started accusing the West in 1982 of "making political abuse of the thousandth anniversary". There are moreover the scientific publications *Voprosy Naučnogo Ateizma* (Questions of Scientific Atheism) and *Voprosy Filosofii* (Philosophical Questions). These latter magazines treat the theme of the christianization of Russia several times, but in a more businesslike manner, in contrast to the more bantering style of the three periodicals first mentioned. A summary is given below of the anti-Orthodox books which have been published or are about to be published in the Soviet Union in the period that the Russian Church has
been preparing to celebrate her millennium. The contents, as well as sceptically intended quotation marks, have been taken from the book or catalogue, unless otherwise indicated.

a. Historiographical works

E.S. Baričev, Pravoslavnaja Cerkov': istorija i social 'naja suščnost' (The Orthodox Church: history and social nature), 1982.

In the Foreword mention is made of the distortions, exaggerations, and downright falsifications of the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian history, due to the publications of the Moscow Patriarchate in connection with “the great jubilee” and “the historical occasion” of 1988.


Texts by progressive 18th and 19th century Russian historians and by Soviet researchers, e.g. Karamzin, Klyuchevski, Pokrovski, and Nikolski, who refute the positive role of the Orthodox Church in Russian history and point out that the actual role of the church was reactionary.


The author sets the scholarly facts concerning the christianization of old Russia against the theological legends and clerical myths, which distort reasons, the nature, and the consequences of this process. The book is written as a reaction against clerical propaganda which is active in connection with the approaching thousandth anniversary of the establishment of Christianity as the state religion in Russia.

As opposed to the legends in Russian Orthodoxy concerning the monasteries as propagators of culture and moral values, the author shows the true social and ideological role of the monasteries. The book contains reasoned criticism of the ideals and the way of life of those living in a monastery and reveals the anti-humanitarian nature of monasticism.


Opposed to the ideas of Russian religious philosophers at the beginning of this century, which are now spread by the Russian church and presented as proof of the cultural contribution of the church to the national heritage.

N.S. Gordienko, Sovremennoe Russkoe Pravoslavie (Modern Russian Orthodoxy), 1987.

A critical description of the ideology and practices of the Russian church on the eve of her thousandth anniversary. The book shows the untenability of the attempts of theologians to present Russian Orthodoxy as a positive factor in social progress, as the protectress of cultural traditions and as the champion of good morals.


Concerned with the socio-economic and political premisses for the introduction of a new religion, the process of the christianization of nations and the role of Orthodoxy in the further development of production forces and culture in Russia.

Summary of 28 contributions to a scholarly conference on the historical meaning of the introduction of Christianity in Slavic areas. Archeological, linguistic, and cultural-historical considerations.


The authors, Soviet philosophers, historians, and linguists, present the authentic nature of events and the real causes against the theological falsifications of the history of the christianization of Russia. Aimed at non-Marxist and more particularly the clerical writing of history.


About the Troitse-Sergi monastery, situated on the Makovets Hill in Zagorsk. An explanation of its cultural importance but also a criticism of the idealised views on the role of the monastery in history and a refutation of the bourgeois-clerical fabrications such as the despising of Russian culture by the Soviet government.


About the Ukrainian church abroad which, assisted by the Vatican and Western intelligence services, incites the Ukrainian population against the Soviet Union by means of radio programmes and underground activities.

Concerned with new tendencies in the ideology and the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in connection with her thousandth anniversary.

S. Savel'ev, Idejnoe Bankrotstvo Bogoiskatel'stva v Rossii Načala XXv (The Ideological Bankruptcy of the Godsearching in Russia at the beginning of the Twentieth Century), 1987.

About the Petersburg group “New Religious Consciousness” which preached a new “religious revolution”.

N.N., Christianstvo i Rus' (Christianity and Rus), 1987.

A collection of articles about the Christianization of Kiev-Rus, the church at the time of the Tartar oppression, the rise and dissolution of the patriarchate, the support of the church for dictatorship and bondage, and the church after the October Revolution.


About the Union of Brest. The author shows that the nature of this was against the people and the Ukrainian nation. That is also the case with the anti-Soviet activities of the uniate church abroad at present, which has joined the “crusade” of imperialism against the USSR.


A collection on the position of the Russian Orthodox church in the cultural-historical development of Russia. The authors show the untenability of the attempts of theologians to idealise the past of the Russian Orthodox Church, to colour this past and to present the Russian Orthodox Church as the only preserver of historic traditions.

A. Kuz’min, red., Kreščenie Rusi v Trudach Russkich in Sovetskich Učennych (The Baptism of Rus in the Works
A scholarly critical analysis of the christianization of the old Rus, of the socio-economic and spiritual situation before the introduction of christianity and of the struggle of christianity with the heathen and heretical movements.

A. Borodin, *Christianstvo na Rusi* (Christianity in Rus), 1988. Publication announced.

An historical-scholarly criticism of the concepts of church-historians and theologians concerning the role of christianity in the formation of the Russian perception of the State, the organisation of resistance against foreign invaders, the development of morals and the spread of culture and education.


About the origins of the organised Orthodox Church in the Eastern Slavic regions and the consequences of the so-called baptism of Rus for the State and the Old Russian people.


Criticism of modern developments in Russian Orthodoxy as "the theology of the revolution", "the theology of peace" and "Christian patriotism". Exposure of the struggle of the ideologists of the Orthodox Church for the renewal of the old, reactionary ideas and towards the merging of modernism and traditionalism.

From the short description of the contents of the books, the tendency they share will become apparent. Frequently used in the arguments are words like falsifications (*fal'sifikatsii*), distortions (*izvraščenija*), fabrications (*izmyšlenija*), inventions (*rymysli*), myths (*mify*), deceitful representation (*ložnoje predstavlenie*) and pretentions (*pritjazanija*), usually with the
adjective "clerical", "bourgeois-clerical", "ecclesiastical" or "theological". That is a clear setting that leaves no room for doubts. Soviet anti-Orthodox literature is not a factual writing of history, nor is it a hypothetical analysis or neutral scholarship. This is just as true of the ecclesiastical historiography and the theological view of history that they dispute. Both desire to present a message for which they simplify the complex history and idealise it. But ecclesiastical historiography has no chance in the Soviet Union. Against whom then, are all these Soviet ideological attacks actually aimed?

This brings us to a strange aspect of the Soviet anti-millennium literature and of atheistic propaganda in general. It is fighting against a church which exists and continues to expand without explicit propaganda, against a philosophy of life that is presented as outmoded but which continues to exert magnetism. One has to fight against ideas which, although they have not been committed to paper in Soviet society for seventy years, are experienced by many in that society as obvious truths, and remain indissolubly bound to the spiritual tradition of their own culture. Theologically one may speak of the insurmountable strength of belief, from a scholarly point of view one can only wonder at the vitality of religion and recognize it.

The bent toward the religious and the interest in theological-philosophical thought is indicated in Soviet literature by the unique Russian expression "god-searching" or "god-seeking" (bogoiskatel'stvo). These term came into existence in the first years of this century in Russia as an expression of religious renewal among the Russian intelligentsia. The Communist authors saw even then themselves forced to take action against this tendency. In 1909 Georgi Plechanov, the father of Russian Marxism, wrote a long article Concerning the so-called Religious Search in Russia, in which he says: 'At present there is a strong demand here for 'religion' for many social reasons . . . . That may be explained by the great events that Russia has experienced in recent years. Under
the influence of these events the belief of many, many ‘intellectuals’ in a speedy victory of a more or less progressive society has disappeared.” This article was re-published in 1977 in a collection of atheistic writings of Plechanov, and the editor again mentions in the introduction the “considerable growth during recent years of the interest in religion, in ecclesiastical art and in the cultural role of the church.” Against this “one-sided interest” is set Plechanov’s criticism of the God-searching and the religious interest in his time, thus unintentionally admitting that little has changed in this respect in seventy years.

b. Works of art criticism

The aforementioned works on the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian history deal with the “alleged” cultural impact of the Russian church. In addition to this, however, specific works have been written on religious art in Russia. These provide extensive atheistic art criticism, an interpretation and appreciation of Russian religious art with the explicit rejection of any original religious meaning. This atheistic art criticism originated in the Soviet Union by a reaction to the rediscovery by the people, and in particular by the Russian intelligentsia, of Russian Orthodox art, which had been neglected and ignored for years. In a book published by D.M. Ugrinovich in 1982 Iskusstvo i Religija (Art and Religion) the increasing interest in Old Russian art during the last ten to fifteen years is valued positively. At the same time art historians, critics, museum staff, and excursion leaders are summoned to show in a clearly Marxist manner the inconsistencies and the social function of religious art and to accentuate the role of free thought and atheism in art. The Soviet artists themselves, writers, dramatists, stage-directors, film producers, and painters, are accused of taking very few atheist themes and, worse still, of allowing themselves to be carried away by church
terminology, attributes, symbols, and biblical subjects. This ideological reaction to Russian church art is strengthened in connection with the Orthodox millennium, at least until mid-1987. A.N. Ipatov, Pravoslavie i Russkaja Kul’tura (Orthodoxy and Russian Culture), 1985.

The author shows the real aims envisaged when the church extended writing, architecture, painting and music in Russia. In addition it is shown how the church was perpetually subject to the influences of Russian peasant culture, traditional religious experiences, and ethical representations.


The writers expose the clerical myths concerning the decisive role of Orthodoxy in the shaping of esthetic norms and values.


Concerned with the real relationship of the poet Pushkin to religion and the Church. Shows in particular how the reconciliation of Pushkin with the Church on his deathbed was organised by the Church and the Czar, that his religious poems have been misinterpreted and that Pushkin was always an atheist.


Does the artistic beauty of cult buildings give testimony to religion? Does the beauty of the buildings not arise from non-religious sources? This book answers these questions by revealing the deep conflict of interests between the church and art.

V.A. Zoc, Pravoslavie i Kul’tura: fakty protiv domyslov (Orthodoxy and Culture: facts against assumptions), 1986.

The author uses a great deal of factual material to show the groundlessness of the theological claims to an important role of
the Orthodox church in the development of the spiritual culture of the Russian, White Russian and Ukrainian peoples.

One important thought in Soviet atheistic art-criticism is that the Russian Orthodox Church has wrongly considered herself to be the source and protectress of Russian culture. Christian art reveals nothing of the Christian nature of the Russian people. Soviet authors state that the Russians have always been free-thinkers at heart and distrustful of the clergy. Ecclesiastical art appeared to be art in spite of the church and would often have emerged against the wishes of the church leaders. The art of icon-painting was able to blossom because the painters contravened the rules of the church with regard to this art-form. Religious art must be valued as an achievement of the people, as an expression of its creative spirit, which expressed itself in a religious form because Christianity was the state religion. It was only the abolition of Christianity as a compulsory religion that brought the Russian artist true artistic freedom, and seventy years of Soviet art expressed the true nature of the Russian people better than a thousand years of Orthodox esthetics was capable of doing.

A second central theme of atheistic art analysis is that the beauty of religious art does not comment on the value of religion as a philosophy of life. The authors of the books mentioned warn against the misleading conclusion that religious art is the expression of real human feelings and desires, or that, if religion leads to such high artistic expression, it must be of a deep significance. Against this it is stated that religion has merely concealed its true nature as spiritual oppressor in its esthetic expression. The Orthodox Church is also accused of tempting young people to religion by means of the esthetic effect of her liturgy.

In general the anti-Orthodox books from the section on atheistic art criticism are scarcely scholarly. By means of a grim ideological interpretation and in a trivializing tone Russian art is de-Christianized in retrospect. In contrast to Soviet atheistic
studies on Christian theology, which are clearly of a more rational nature due to the abstract subject matter, the criticism of religious art is charged with emotion. It seems as though the authors are unhappy that such magnificent art has been devoted to religious themes. The form is admired but the content is rejected. They know that ecclesiastical art and esthetics exert a strongly evocative influence on the Russian people and offer a welcome means of escape from the ideological dullness and lack of spirituality of Soviet existence, and that is an extra reason for Soviet atheistic authors to immunise the population through their works against esthetic-religious influences. True scholarly art criticism is to be found in the Soviet Union in studies that have not been written in connection with the atheist propaganda, and in that respect many recognised standard works of Soviet authors have appeared on the art of the icon and on church architecture.

c. Publication of the 19th century Russian atheists

Another form of retrospective de-Christianization of Russian culture is the extra attention paid to atheist philosophers and anti-church commentators of the nineteenth century. It is a fact that there was a strong anti-church current among the Russian cultural elite in the previous century and that the revolutionary intelligentsia was entirely atheistic from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. This fact, however, is not simply recognised in Soviet anti-Orthodox literature and explained in a businesslike manner starting from the political-reactionary standpoint of the Russian Orthodox Church, but is exploited in an expressly ideological manner. The anti-religious disposition of the Russian political publicists in the last century is quoted in the Soviet view as proof of an innate hostility to religion in the character of Russians. That is naturally just as much an idealization of the Russian soul as is the Slavic mystification con-
cerning the innate religious nature of the Russian people.

The second argument that has to be brought against the Soviet treatment of nineteenth century Russian atheists is its selective nature. The equally strongly represented religious philosophers in the history of Russian ideas — who are incredibly popular among the present Soviet intelligentsia — are ignored.

The atheistic writings of nineteenth century Russian revolutionaries and the critical or satirical stories about the Orthodox Church by classical Russian authors are not published specifically in connection with the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church. They are constantly published, but are adapted for the anti-millennium campaign by the references made to them in introductions. The introduction or foreword to the publications make it abundantly clear that the texts are republished as a form of atheist propaganda and not for purely scientific reasons.

This form, however, in spite of the accompanying commentaries, is the most scholarly and most interesting form of atheistic propaganda. The nineteenth century texts themselves are not tampered with by Soviet editors, although the word "god" is written without an initial capital. The historical texts themselves are on the one hand an argument in favour of Soviet atheism, and on the other an unintended criticism of it. They reveal that Soviet atheism today, in addition to a Marxist source, also has its own Russian source, to which the Soviet ideologists appeal and about which they boast. But at the same time it becomes clear from nineteenth century Russian works how twentieth century Soviet atheism has been methodologically degenerated. Whereas the nineteenth century authors give spontaneous, personally motivated religious criticism, not laid on an ideological Procrustean bed and in open controversy with opponents, the Soviet ideologists now give a dogmatically petrified, historically distorted description of church history and do so from a safe, propagandistic monopoly position.

Given below are the recent Soviet publications and anthologies of Russian church critics.
N.S. Gordienko, sost., *Russkie Pisateli o Religii i Cerkvi: izbrannaja proza* (Russian Writers on Religion and Church: selected prose), 1984. Texts by Radishchev, Gertsen, Pomyalovski, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Melnikov, Turgenyev, Leskov, G.I. Uspenski, Chekhov, L.N. Tolstoi, Mamin-Sibiryak, Korolenko, Kuprin, L.I. Andreyev, Gorki. In an epilogue the compiler points out the topicality of the anthology in respect of the thousandth anniversary of the “Baptism of Rus”, where ecclesiastical circles would like to present things as though Russia had an extraordinary religious tradition. The compiler suggests on the other hand that the atheistic relay race of classical Russian literature has been taken over by Soviet writers. A knowledge of the atheistic tradition is important in neutralising the attempts of clerical-theological circles to extend their lying fabrications.

L.A. Velčanskaja, sost., *Cel’ žizni — žizn* (The Aim of Life is Life), 1984. Texts by Belinski, Gertsen, Ogarev, Butashevich-Petrashevski, Chernyshevski, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev, Antonovich. The compiler refutes in her foreword the Slavophile view of Russia and the viewpoints of Russian philosophers from the “religious renaissance” at the beginning of the twentieth century. She reveals the progressive nature of Russian atheism and the methodological inconsistencies which result from its ignorance of Marxism.


F.G. Nikitina, sost., *Petrashevcy ob Ateizme, Religii i Cerkvi* (Petrashevtsy about Atheism, Religion and the Church), 1986. Texts by members of the revolutionary company of Petrashevtsy, utopian socialists and democrats, who opposed the mystification of human relationships.


Works of the prominent nineteenth century Russian revolutionary which to day retain their value for atheist education and research. Most of the material is published here for the first time.

Thus we conclude our summary of recent atheist literature in the Soviet Union. It should again be said that this only covers part of the literature, to the extent that this is connected with the publicity campaign aimed against the millennium of the Russian Orthodox Church. This summary is incomplete as soon as published, because the ideological-scholarly struggle with the Russian Orthodox Church and with religion in general continues.

d. Positive approaches to Russian religious culture

It would be incorrect to be of the opinion that the Soviet study of the relationship between the church and Russian culture is limited to the standpoint, style, and method of the anti-religious works summarised in the previous section. Those are works intended for propaganda and are not written for scholarship’s sake. However, there are many competent and famous Soviet scholars who make invaluable contributions to the recording of Russian religious culture. Dmitri Likhachev, the internationally renowned literature scholar, should be mentioned in the very first instance, a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, chairman of the recently established Soviet Cultural Fund and, apparently, a member of the Orthodox Church. In addition there are many mediaevalists, art historians and iconologists (like V.
Lazarev and M. Alpatov, who wrote standard works about Russian iconography). As a recent example of objective Soviet scholarly study on ecclesiastical art, mention might be made of A. Komech's book on church architecture in Kievan Rus.\textsuperscript{50}

A second remark should be made concerning the publication of the nineteenth century Russian philosophers. Although atheist propaganda accords an exclusive place to anti-church philosophers from Russian history, in scholarly Soviet circles there is an increasing number of claims that religious philosophers should also be published — those philosophers to whom the current god-seekers among the Soviet intellectuals are attracted. These philosophers are officially not referred to as "religious" philosophers but are called "idealist" philosophers. Awareness is growing that they are just as much a part of Russian culture as are the so-called "revolutionary democrats", the materialist and nihilist writers of the last century to which the Soviet ideologists appeal. Pleas for the publication of the religious philosophers are made regularly, since the critical writers' congress of 1986. As, for instance in the \textit{Literaturnaja Gazeta} on the May 13, 1987. In a discussion on cultural education a participant said: "I really cannot understand at all why it is not possible to publish the Russian idealist philosophers which were the fame of Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries — V.S. Solovyev and others. A person cannot regard himself as educated without knowing at least the names of these philosophers. Classical Russian philosophy cannot be limited to Gertsen, Chernyshevski etc. But that is exactly what we do. We tear away pieces and cut things out."\textsuperscript{51}

One of those Russian thinkers has been published meanwhile. A complete Russian edition of Chaadayev's eight philosophical letters and part of his ordinary correspondence was published for the first time.\textsuperscript{52} Irritation has been expressed more than once about the slow progress of a complete edition of Dostoyevski, who is actually quoted remarkably often in connection with the moral renewal in today's Soviet society.
The fact that in Soviet scholarship today a more subtle view is developing of Russian history and of the role of ecclesiastical culture is apparent from the announced complete publication of the great nineteenth century writers of history, S. Solovyev, the father of the aforementioned religious philosopher, and Klyuchevski, and from the discussions concerning the publishing of Karamzin. Although they are not published primarily because of their positive view of the Orthodox Church, this view will surely arouse more interest than the commonplace disparaging writing of history by the writers of atheist propaganda.

As a last example of the recent changes in the Soviet attitude to Russian religious culture, mention should be made of an article in Literaturnaja Gazeta about Cyril and Methodius, the apostles of the Slavs. The author criticizes the ignorance of the Soviet people about these founders of the Slavic-Russian culture and pleads for a national feast-day on the May 24 as is already the case in Bulgaria. In the still unavoidably schizophrenic manner, this article minimalises the strictly religious activities of Cyril and Methodius, but the recognition of their decisive role in Russian culture is a clear rehabilitation of these saints and contrasts with the ideological approach of atheistic cultural history.

In view of these positive developments in the Soviet perception of the Russian past, it is all the more noticeable that the Orthodox church herself is not given any chance of publishing her view of Russian history and its role in creating national culture. The Russian church has not been able to publish much about her own millennium. Her scholarly production is limited to a number of articles in the monthly magazine Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, intended for internal use and for foreign subscribers, and in her yearbook Bogoslovskie Trudy (Theological Works), also not available in Soviet bookshops. The authors of the Soviet anti-millennium books quote extensively from that couple of articles, so as to show to what extent the Russian church abuses the millennium for propaganda purposes. The very first anti-
millennium book, that of Barichev in 1982, commences with this reproach to the church, but at that time no single church article had been published. The *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* had only published a speech by Patriarch Pimen, and that was sufficient for Barichev to speak of “extensive propaganda” by the Russian church.

And yet the Moscow Patriarchate has published one single book in connection with the millennium, but that was for foreign countries. It is called *Die orthodoxe Kirche in Russland* and was published in Zurich in 1982, and later in other West European countries. It was compiled by Fred Mayer, a celebrated Swiss photographer, and Pitirim, Archbishop of Volokolamsk. Pitirim, now Metropolitan, is also head of the publication department of the Moscow Patriarchate and chief editor of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. The book is primarily a book to look at and has truly magnificent large-scale colour photographs of the liturgy, life in the monasteries and the architecture of the Russian Orthodox church. In addition it has five articles on the history, architecture, icons, spirituality and the situation of the Russian Orthodox Church today.

What would have been more obvious than to publish this book in Russia as well? Maybe without the beautiful photographs which would turn the book into a best-seller and thus make the considerable anti-millennium literature sink into immediate oblivion. The articles are moreover anything but critical of the Soviet authorities. The fact that this is still not possible in Soviet Russia shows clearly the enforced scholarly isolation of the church. The fact that Metropolitan Pitirim cannot publish his book about Russian ecclesiastical culture in his own country is the more noticeable, since in November 1986 he was appointed a committee number of the recently established Soviet Cultural Fund. It is equally strange that Pitirim did not publish his personal contribution to the book, the article “Zehn Jahrhunderte Russisch-Orthodoxe Kirche” in a Russian magazine. Pitirim’s
article was published, however, in 1985 in the East German church magazine *Zeichen der Zeit*. The latter publication is remarkable in one certain aspect. It is not only a new translation from the Russian with small variations in sentence structure and use of words, it is also a censured version. The censor has quite systematically made stipulations about one kind of adjunct: namely that every adjectival or advertial use which contributes a positive or typically spiritual dimension to the subsequent noun or the event described should be left out. The result is a minimalised and colourless history of the church, in which people and events, actions and affairs that the author accentuates and had given a clearly religious value, are reduced to abstractions. The relevant adjectives and adverbs are: wichtiger, großer, ganz, endgültig, tiefer, unzertrennlicher, immens, froher, grossartiger, hervorragender, deutlicher, echter, eigenständiger, schöpferischer, gewaltiger, christlicher (in the expression “russische christliche Kultur”), hoh, konkreter-moralischer, unablässiger, verlässlicher, unsichtbarer, ständiger, geistlicher, innerlicher, weitgespannter, intensiver, heilig, klarer, religiöser, voller, eiferiger, energischer, unschätzbarer, wesentlicher, allgemeiner, siegreicher, patriottischer, berühmter, freiwilliger, providentieller, segensreicher, gottmenschlicher, welterlösender, freier, unentgeltlicher, zahlreicher, trostender, hellender, heroischer, unaufhörlicher, weit, vollkommen, systematischer, unbestritten, lebendiger, unauflöslicher, katholischer, allumfassender, russischer (in the expression “russisch geistlicher”), glänzender, wunderbarer, ungeheuerer, opferbereiter, gemeinsamer, offener, unnachgiebiger, solidarischer, herzlicher, erlösender, selbstloser, äußerster, fruchtbarer, mütterlicher, sakraler, reicht.

The omission of these qualifications fits exactly into the Soviet ideological approach to the church and to religion. Undoubtedly the role of the church in Russian history was not as “superlative” as is represented in the historical self-perception of the Russian Orthodox Church, but communist historiography has the very least right to make this kind of reproach concerning the writing of history. If, however, the *Zeichen der Zeit* (signs of the times)
in contemporary Soviet society, notably glasnost' and ideological self-criticism, are the forerunners of a real new thinking in the Soviet Union, than it could be expected that Soviet communist approach to christianity will lose its historiographical one-sidedness, if not, in the long run, its ideological prejudices.

Notes

1. Ateističeskij Slovar', 40.
2. For a description of the re-evaluation of the "Lenin generation" in atheist literature see J. Delaney Grossman (1972).
5. Ateističeskij Slovar', 419.
6. Timmer gives several examples of typographic atheism. In a Russian book on the art of translation Schiller is quoted in German, "gott" being the only substantive to appear in lower case. In another Russian translation manual Pushkin is quoted in English with "god" appearing in lower case whereas "the Devil" commences with a capital. Ch.B. Timmer (1969), 167-168.
7. What Th. Blakeley called the via negativa, via positiva and via negationis to describe the various ways of arriving at proof in Soviet atheism can be seen as the atheist mirror image of a classic fundamental theology. Via negativa, means demonstrating that those properties and functions traditionally attributed to the concept of god — intangibility, the capacity to create, ethical perfection and rational unrecognizability — are untenable. Via positiva is the Soviet version of the theory of Feuerbach/ Marx on human estrangement; as such it can be matched against the theological concept of man being naturally attracted to God. Lastly, via negationis means the rebuttal of the classical proofs of God's existence given by Western medieval philosophy Th. Blakeley (1969).
10. Pajusov, op. cit., 53 and 56. The author concludes: "Indeed, whichever matter concerning the improvement of our armed forces' combat potential we consider — be it training, equipment and morale, combat readiness and preparedness or discipline — each problem exposes the potential of religion to hinder success in these matters" (57).

17. As happened to the party leader of Kirov. See Sovetskaja Rossija 18th May 1984.
18. The workings of social control in the areas of religion and atheism are clearly shown in the collected newspaper articles and readers letters in E. Voss, ed. (1977), 179-195.
19. Ateističeskij Slovar': keyword ateističeskoe obščestvennoe mnienie.
20. Il'ičev, op. cit.
37. Literaturnaja Gazeta 13th May 1987. Nujkin's article in Novyi Mir 1987, No. 5, 245-259. Articles on these writers had already appeared
in 1986: *Literaturnaja Gazeta*, 14th May (on Bykov); *Literaturnaja Gazeta* 13th August and 15th October (on Ajtmatov); *Naš Sovremennik* No. 5, (on Astafev); *Knizhnoe Obozrenie* No. 5 (on Bykov). These articles suggest movement in Soviet atheism, a discussion or polemic between writers who are sympathetic to religion and desire an open approach to religio-philosophical and ethical themes — and doctrinaire professional atheists. It is too early to see whether or not this represents a new development in Soviet atheism. It is enough here to refer to Nujkin’s article rejecting the old dogmatic school of Soviet atheism.

43. T. van Boven (1967).
44. *Golos Rodiny* 1987, No. 11.

48. This should not be seen as a response to Jevtusenko’s plea for a Soviet edition of the bible on the grounds of its great cultural significance for 19th century Russian literature, see *Komsomol’skaja Pravda*, 10th December 1986.

49. Plechanov (1977), 8 and 248-249.