"Scientific Atheism" in Action
Soviet Sociology of Religion as an Agent of Marxist-Atheist Propaganda from the 1960s to the 1980s

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Abstract This paper discusses the methodological challenges of Soviet sociology of religion in the period between 1960 and 1989, when it was charged with the contradictory task of investigating the actual standing of religion in Soviet society and, at the same time, with proposing methods through which the official "scientific atheism," deeply rooted in Marxism, could be imposed upon the very populations that were the subject of its inquiries. The authors propose an insight into the actual practices of the researchers, based on little-known archival materials from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. The materials adduced by the authors show the various ways in which Soviet believers were surveyed and in which questionnaires were constructed, illustrating the modes of argumentation used in atheist propaganda conducted alongside such surveys, and giving a rare glimpse into the methodological discussions that were taking place at conferences organized by the Institute of Scientific Atheism. The authors track also the sociological conceptions and typologies adopted by Soviet sociology.

Keywords atheism; ideology; Marxist propaganda; methodology of sociology of religion; scientific world-view; Soviet Union 1960–1989

Soviet research always considered religion, viewed from different perspectives, an important area of study. The period of the 1960s to 1970s

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could even be labeled the Soviet Union's "religiological Renaissance." It was when a renewed interest in the sociology of religion, intertwined with the obligatory atheistic propagandizing and aspiration to "eliminate the relics," resulted in the formation of a new set of research tools, which cannot be neatly located within the conceptual frameworks of either science or religion. Religious studies developed in two directions. On the one hand, one can point to the emergence of interesting studies of the phenomenon of religion, its functions, forms, and social-communicative characteristics. Such studies were disguised as "criticism of bourgeois sociology and Religious Studies." This approach is exhibited in the widely known works of, amongst others, Yuriy Levada[1] and Dmitriy Ugrinovich.[2] Following Western theories, they gradually introduced the conception of "religiosity" as something distinct from "religion." This, in fact, allowed them to perceive in faith something that was no mere "relic" or "eructation" (as it was often called in official propaganda), but was, instead, a peculiarly human component of religiosity, and which they could then treat as an appropriate object of scientific analysis. Igor Yablokov[3] defined "religiosity" as

> the social quality of individuals and groups, which is expressed through the totality of religious properties (characteristics).

Victor Pivovarov discusses religiosity as

> the reflection, in an individual consciousness, of forms of social consciousness that result from the existence of religion in a given society at a certain period of its historical development. To be precise, particular instances of religiosity take the form of religious knowledge and customs, allowing participation in the activities of a religious community.[4]

Dmitriy Ugrinovich defines "religiosity" in two ways: as

> the influence of religion on consciousness and behavior, both in separate individuals, and in demographic groups;[5]

1. Yuriy A. Levada, *Sotsial'naya priroda religii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 263.
2. Dmitriy M. Ugrinovich, *Vvedenie v teoreticheskoe religiovedenie* (Moscow: Mysl', 1973), 239.
3. Igor N. Yablokov, *Sotsiologiya religii* (Moscow: Mysl', 1979), 123.
4. Victor G. Pivovarov, *Religioznost': opyt i problemy izucheniya* (Yoshkar-Ola: Mariyskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1976), 76.
5. Ugrinovich, *Vvedenie v teoreticheskoe religiovedenie*, 104.

and as

> a state of consciousness and behavior of individuals and certain groups of people.[6]

Mikhail Kalashnikov (1970) characterizes "religiosity" as

> the degree to which an individual is devoted to a religion and suffers from religious complexes.[7]

The concept of "religiosity" was meant to help in creating a genuine picture of religious representations in the Soviet population, and to become a more efficient tool in describing the processes unfolding in that society. In the second half of the 20th century, a class-based conception of religion could not anymore be employed to explain the vitality of religion. While the point of view on religion remained, without any concessions, one which conceived of it as "relics," a gradual transition to a more diversified approach to dealing with religious forms of consciousness opened up the territory somewhat, allowing actual scholarly research maneuvers. Indeed, it was around this time that Charles Glock and Gerhard Lenski[8] proposed replacing the traditional idea of "religion" with the conception of "religiosity," elaborated by means of five indicators: religious experience, religious faith, worship, knowledge, and the influence of religion on individual behavior. Using this conception, Soviet scholars undertook to distance themselves from an exclusively ideologically motivated approach to the study of those who engage in religious belief. An analysis of questionnaires used in the 1960s and 1970s points to the presence of all of these indicators in various surveys.

On the other hand, the Communist Party expressly required that science and scholarship implement directives aimed at realizing the program of constructing a communist society. One of the defining characteristics of that society, atheism, was regarded as being integrally linked to educa-

6. Lazar' N. Velikovich, Marlen P. Gapochka, and Viktor I. Gardzha, eds., *Religiya i tserkov' v sovremennuyu epokhu*, (Moscow: Mysl', 1976), 55.

7. Mikhail F. Kalashnikov, *Molodoe pokolenie i religiya: Opyt konkretno-sotsial'nogo i sotsial'no-psikhologicheskogo issledovaniya* (Perm': Permskoe knizhnoe izdatelstvo, 1977), 29.

8. Charles Y. Glock, *Sotsiologiya religii v sotsiologii segodnya. Problemy i perspektivy* (Moscow: Progress, 1965); Gerhard Emmanuel Lenski, *The Religious Factor* (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

tion, upbringing, and the emancipation of human beings from all forms of prejudice. It was therefore incumbent upon science to furnish some kind of theoretical justification for the claims made by the official ideology with respect to religion—its supposed "death" or "disappearance," and its "elimination" as a relic to be overcome in the context of the ongoing life of society.

> The idea of a "relic," which played . . . an important role not only in official ideology, but also in the conceptual apparatus of the Soviet social sciences, and also in the societal consciousness, was a peculiar instrument, making it possible to discuss deficiencies and problems of Soviet society within the framework of the still severely censored official discourse. One was able to address the causes of some contemporary reality or other that had persisted even forty years after the victory of the socialist revolution by referring to this as a "relic."[9]

Thus, it is interesting to consider in what ways the sociology practiced then served to fulfil the "party injunction" to promote atheism. Any given sociological investigation (even ones conducted in the field) was aimed—in most cases explicitly—at demonstrating relatively low levels of religiosity in the population, at showing the incompatibility of religiosity with critical scientific thinking (synonymous with education) and with materialism, and at justifying the "actual death" of faith brought about by social progress, education and properly organized propaganda work.

The need to campaign actively against religiosity in the population was frequently stressed in both education and propaganda. In all possible ways, the almost "accidental" character of religion was being shown. It is from this point of view that the tasks of the sociology of religion were delineated.

> No matter which notion of the sociology of religion we consider, they are related, in one way or another, to other branches of scientific atheism. The validity of considering the sociology of religion to be a component helping to render scientific atheism complete stems, also, from the fact that Marxist sociology of religion has a scientific-atheistic content, and is oriented towards perfecting the management of the process of implementing an atheist upbringing.[10]

9. Sergey S. Alymov, "Ponyatie «perezhytok» i sovetskie sotsial'nye nauki v 50–60-e gody," *Antropologicheskiy forum* 16 (2012).

10. Yablokov, *Sotsiologiya religii*, 12.

This kind of balancing act, whereby a discipline was positioned right on the boundary between science and ideology, was thought to be achievable, above all, through applied sociology, whose calling was to furnish justifications of one sort or another for the prevalent ideas of the period—namely, those of scientific communism. An important part of this investigative approach was the manner in which surveys were constructed and analyzed. We can offer here only an indirect study of the questionnaires used, on the basis of materials gathered by a number of expeditions, starting from 1960s, and preserved by the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории, abbreviated as РГАСПИ, or RGASPI). I adduce below some examples of how the religiosity of the population was described:

> Ardatov I. K.[11] (born 1924): There are icons in the house, but he does not believe in god and he would not protest, if the icons are taken away. His wife says that without them "the corner will be ugly, and neighbors will laugh."[12]
>
> Dolgov M. and Dolgova Z. N.: There are two icons in the home, but they are kept only in the kitchen; no family member prays. He declares that the icons will be taken away when the children have grown up a bit, and that now they are only hanging there because this is what the mother wants.[13]
>
> Drobyshev P. K.: There are icons in the home. Asked, "what do the icons give you?," the host answered: "This is my father's heritage and it serves as a reminder of my parents."[14]
>
> Poplevkin P. K. (born 1924): "The only sign of religiosity in the home is the presence of one icon, which was brought over from the church at the time

11. It was customary in the Soviet Union to omit a person's first name in writing. Instead, the initials of the first name and the patronymics were normally used. This custom is reflected below in the quotations, as well as in the main text of the paper, as and when first names were omitted in the materials referred to. The quotations here also preserve the Soviet orthography, which required one to start the name of the Christian and Muslim God with an uncapitalized letter. For reasons of consistency, the names of religions, denominations, and their members, normally not capitalized in Russian, have also been left uncapitalized in the quotations given here (editor's note).

12. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History F. 606, inventory no. 4, dep. 156, 20. Hereafter, other materials from the Archive are referred to through the Russian transliterated abbreviation RGASPI.

13. Ibid., 23.

14. Ibid., 27.

when it was being demolished. This icon was left for a long time in the attic, together with other household objects. They built a new house in 1964 and placed this icon in the corner of the kitchen. "Neighbors have icons, and we do not want them to think of us as godless people."[15]

Zaitseva N. Ye.: She believes in god for the sake of tradition, having icons so as not to be ashamed in front of her peers. . . . Asked about her beliefs, about her worldview, she answered " . . . I've watched them launch a rocket on TV. It was people who did it. If my father were brought back from his grave, he wouldn't believe it, and would no doubt say that they are doing it with the help of god. But I won't say that." "So why do you have icons and pray to him?" "It is for consolation. You see, young people go to the club, and I pray, to get calm, so that I feel much better. And who knows whether he exists or not. In the other world, we will all see one another and then we will learn clearly whether he exists or not. But if I feel better after praying—what is the reason? It means, there is the soul." "But didn't the lord god create woman without a soul, as the Bible says?" we ask her. "God could not have done it. The Bible says that every human being is made up of the body and the mortal soul." "You say that science explains a lot—the weather, and other phenomena—and that it creates machines, but how does science explain the origin of man? Do you know?" "No, I do not know, because I only went to school for one year." I offer the scientific explanation for the origins of man. "But anyway, it is more understandable that god created him."[16] . . .

"The bible says that men cannot know nature, or change it. How do you view this?" "And so why did men learn to predict the weather, then?" she asks. "They do it with the help of science," we tell her. "But their forecasts are not always right." "Why not?" "They make mistakes," she says. "But isn't it god who is intervening to cause problems for them?" "Obviously not. Does he seek to obstruct men flying to where he lives, to the heavens? Maybe he just can't deal with machines," she says. "But isn't he almighty?" "This is why I have doubts about him. I pray, every day, before meals and going to sleep. But when I am sick, I go to the hospital. Who knows whether he exists not? Only in the next world will we see one another and be able to say who is right and who is wrong."[17]

It is clear even in these questions that the "correct" answers are sug-

15. Ibid., 59.
16. Ibid., 27.
17. Ibid., 33.

gested to the respondents, rather than stemming from their own worldviews. The selection of subjects brought up in the surveys aims at demonstrating, for propaganda purposes, that people are indifferent to the essence of religion, and care merely about its "formal" elements, such as adherence to traditions, concerns about how they might be judged, and respect for parents. This manner of conducting surveys made it possible for researchers of the 1960s to claim that "religion has, in our country, 'a peripheral status'; the population and various social-demographic groups are liberated, to a great degree, from the influence of religion."[18] This brief sample also brings to our notice the topic of icons, which cannot be treated as "the only sign of religiosity," since it in fact illustrates the tragic pages from our history, with churches having been destroyed, stories of how icons were saved being retold, and fear being overcome when an icon was hung at home—i.e. the history of spiritual strength of ordinary men.[19] It is easy for us, now, to perceive the accounts presented in these surveys through such generalizing lenses, but we should keep in mind that even just a few decades ago this line of thinking would have been impossible

18. Viktor I. Gardzha, "Sotsiologiya religii," in *Sotsiologiya v Rossii*, ed. Vladimir A. Yadov (Moscow: Institut sotsiologii RAN, 1998), 314.

19. Let us adduce here the testimony of Professor Valentina F. Filatova, a dialectologist at Borisoglebskiy Gosudarstvenny Pedagogicheskiy Institut (the State Pedagogical Institute at Borisoglebsk), who spent several dozen years gathering materials on folk spirituality in Voronezh Oblast. "Icons, crosses, and even vessels from vandalized churches were saved, hidden, protected, wherever this was feasible. This was done everywhere. For instance, in the village of Tret'yaki, in the Borisoglebsky District of Voronezh Oblast, they managed to preserve the Icon of the Virgin Mary known as "Fast Novice," painted in the 19th century at Athos, in the shrine of Saint Andrew the Apostle, the Protokletos [at the Skete of Saint Andrew, Σκήτη Αγίου Ανδρέου]. The icon was saved by an inhabitant of the village, Mariya Danilova, who carried it at night on her head (the icon is large and heavy) from the vandalized church to her home, and protected it secretly until her death. Later on, the icon was passed to Mariya Ivanovna Peregubova, who donated it to the Tret'yaki parish on the day of the consecration of the church of Saints Kosma and Damian, on 14th November 2004. When the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, located on the estate of Prince Sergei Mikhailovitch Volkonsky, was vandalized (nowadays, it corresponds to the hamlet of Pavlovka in the Gribanovsky District of Voronezh Oblast), according to the testimony of eyewitnesses (the memory of which was kept alive by their descendants), little angels, placed earlier in small rosettes in a frieze that adorned the temple, were scattered all over the park. The angels were preserved for a long time. But it could also happen thus: the icons were used to make doors, tables, chests, and even floors. Russians are a vast and great people, and so cannot be squeezed into any schematism." Valentina F. Filatova, in discussion with the author about the role of icons in peasants' life, March 2012. See also Valentina F. Filatova, *Semiotika magii: Leksika, struktura i semantika voronezhskikh magicheskikh obryadov* (n.p.: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012), 43–70.

for an atheistically minded researcher, who would have sincerely believed in the "backwardness" of the peasant he was questioning.

Taking as an example the above-quoted discussion involving Ms. Zaitseva, we can easily reconstruct the logic of such surveys. It is obvious that the respondent is afraid of the conversation and, because of that, says what she is "expected to": "I believe for the sake of tradition," but also "have doubts"; "for consolation," but "because things can be better understood this way"; "just in case," but also because "this is what the soul needs." Not able to keep within the constraints of what is officially permitted, the woman shifts to talking about her own innermost domain—about her soul, personal affections, and ties to her father and the rest of her family. The interviewer's questions become provocative: we encounter intentional distortion of the Bible's text, the mixing up of scientific and theological modes of argumentation, attempts to show deficiencies in the respondent's logic. Such questions[20] make up a blatant piece of propaganda for the "scientific world-view," while the answers in fact furnish glaring proof of the living faith of someone who quite clearly feels intimidated by the government—a government whose representatives are, in this case, the researchers themselves.[21] Such surveys were used, without any further arguments being offered, as scientific justification for the idea of a "relic," intended to symbolize, in turn, everything traditional and archaic. "Relics" were the favorite subject of the social sciences of the period. No matter what approach was taken to discussing the nature of "relics," the reasons for their persistence would be reduced, by and large, to the following: "consciousness lagging behind being," Western influences, the ignorance of those interviewed, and deficiencies in what had so far been achieved in the sphere of educational reform. All of these were just instances of the "classical" type of explanation that had already been devised "under Stalin."

> We conduct propaganda and we shall conduct propaganda against religious prejudices. The legislation of our country states that every citizen has the right to practice any religion. This is a matter of one's personal conscientious beliefs. Precisely for this reason, we have separated church from state. But having separated church from state, and having declared freedom of re-

20. These, it must be said, really are comparatively naïve attempts to conduct surveys and propaganda at one and the same time.

21. A story comes here to mind, recounted by Valentina F. Filatova, who, during her interactions with villagers, would encounter such questions as "But, daughter, won't you throw us in jail?" Valentina F. Filatova, *Magicheskiy diskurs* (Voronezh: Izdatel'stvo Voronezhskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta, 2010), 26.

> ligious confession, we have also preserved each citizen's right to fight on the path of persuasion, on the path of propaganda and agitation against this or that religion, against all religion. The party cannot remain neutral with respect to religion, and it conducts anti-religious propaganda against all, and all kinds of, religious prejudices, because it stands for science, and religious prejudices go against science, for all religion is contrary to science.[22]

Nevertheless, by 1960 it had became obvious that this position was obsolete. As Vladislav Kelle remarked, the term "relics" encompasses criminals as much as believers, which is illogical, since one and the same cause cannot be the foundation of the most diametrically opposed processes. "The idea that all relics can be explained through regressive consciousness has come under criticism from various positions, and this is a justified criticism."[23] Even so, the concept of "relics," closely associated with the concept of "regressiveness," enjoyed widespread acceptance in the empirical sciences. Soviet ethnography, for instance, had been assigned the task of exploring folk culture first and foremost in order to reveal the degree of "regressiveness" of that culture and, by so doing, to find methods for fighting on behalf of the Soviet nation itself. Such ethnography took aim, in particular, at the peasants, who, throughout the Soviet period, were deemed suspect by the authorities, in that viewed from a standpoint strictly in line with Marxist-Leninist theory they were supposed to make up the social element known as the "lower bourgeoisie."

> Ethnographers can, actually, best comprehend the causes of preservation of those relics, uncover their roots, show their detrimental nature and, by the same token, contribute to their most prompt obliteration.[24]

> In 1959, the Interdisciplinary Expedition for Studying Processes of Changes in Socially-Existential and Cultural Structures of the Ethnicities of the USSR in the Period of Transition from Socialism to Communism was set up, to collect materials for such synthetic studies as, for instance, "The Contemporary Existence of the Rural Population and Perspectives for its Further

22. Joseph V. Stalin, "Beseda s pervoy amerikanskoy rabochey delegatsiey 9 sentyabrya 1927 goda," in *Sotchineniya*, vol. 10 (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1949), 132–33.

23. Vladislav Z. Kelle, "Nekotorye voprosy obshchestvennogo soznaniya," in *Aktual'nye voprosy istoricheskogo materializma. Besedy po aktual'nym problemam nauki*, ed. Dmitriy P. Tselishchev (Moscow: Znanie, 1966), 43–44.

24. "Sovetskaya etnografiya nakanune XXII s'ezda KPSS," *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 4 (1961).

Transformation on the Path to Communism," and "Problems in the Development of a Materialistic World-View and Paths towards the Obliteration of Religious-Existential Relics."[25]

In RGASPI we came across some material that was based on an investigation carried out by some researchers and propagandists in several villages of Voronezh Oblast, and which sought to divide up believers into four different groups[26] based of how they answered the question "What is a believer's representation of God?"

To the *first group* were assigned those who adhered unconditionally to the Symbol of the christian faith, who preserved in their consciousness the picture of god such as created by the authors of the Bible and as the Church requires him to be depicted [*authors' remark*: here the commentators are confusing, either deliberately or out of ignorance, the notion of a "representation of God" with confessional attitudes towards God]. It has emerged that only 64 people, out of 334 convinced believers in Arkhangelskoye, Nikolskoye, and Staraya Toida, upheld orthodox representations pertaining to god; consistent with this, only 19.3% clung to the Trinity, without grasping, however, in what way "one might equal three."

To the *second group* were assigned those who depict god in a sensuous and visual manner, as a godlike elder or a beautiful middle-aged human being, and so on: as omniscient, as rewarding good deeds, and as helping those who implore him to do so while punishing evil and sinfulness. To this concrete representation clung 118 out of 334 convinced believers, corresponding to 35.5% of the respondents. In their case, the symbol of the Trinity was understood merely as a picture of a Father or of a Son. For believers of the *third group* god was not a concrete being, but the holy ghost: invisible and imperceptible, a force, creative everywhere and ruling everything. To this representation of god clung 152 people, or 30.9% of the respondents. They have little or practically no knowledge of Biblical mythology, but are, on the other hand, somewhat more familiar with scientific-technical achievements, and appeared more capable than the others of comprehending higher-level principles couched in more abstract terms. To the *fourth group* were assigned those whose representation of god were so foggy and indeterminate that they could not find an intelligible answer to the question of what the god in whom they believe corresponded to. Only their faith in his sheer existence has re-

25. Alymov, "Ponyatie «perezhytok»," 271.
26. RGASPI F. 606, inventory no. 4, dep. 41, 15.

> mained with them. With them, the sort of answers that were obtained to the question "How do you imagine god?" were ones like this: "We are just believers, nobody has seen god, hence we cannot depict him to ourselves, there is a kind of force, but it isn't something I imagine." 14.5% do not depict god.[27]

The typology adduced above is, on the one hand, devised with the aim of exposing, through their dogmatic grounding, those believers who are firmly rooted in the church. On the other hand, asking direct questions of this kind puts the people surveyed in a situation that is, by any standards, difficult, as it requires them to have an almost theologically learned knowledge of God and the Trinity and, along with this, ignores the very nature of religious perception and the believers' feelings. All of this might, perhaps, be explained in many different ways. For example one could cite, amongst other things, the dubious quality of the authors' (or interviewers') general education, visible in their utterances. Their poor knowledge of the Bible is patently obvious, but their determination to carry out "instructions from the top" is firm: for instance, they embrace the kind of rationalism according to which "believing" in God is identical with "knowing" the truth about God as proclaimed by the Church, even though this is by no means unequivocally the case. Let us also note in connection with this that, even in spite of the general crackdown on confessions of a protestant bent of one kind or another, it was by no means lost on the people themselves that such a commitment with respect to God had to have this non-univocal character. However, from the interviewers' point of view the fight against religion is being "smoothly executed" through the exposing of ignorance or imposing of a different, correct, and scientific form of knowledge concerning God. The main focus, then, was not to explain the respondents' manifold representations of God, but to prove that "no God exists."[28] The methodology for conducting the survey shows quite clearly how the people surveyed were backed into a corner, and had their "ignorance" of religious issues exposed. Those who declared that God is an "incorporeal spiritual being," for instance, found themselves in a tricky situation:

> If god does not have a human appearance, what should one make of the Bible's statement about man being created in the image and after the like-

27. Ibid., 16.

28. As one hardly unfamiliar character in Bulgakov's novel says, "All the fun is in showing how it's done." Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Michael Glenny, Vintage Classics (London: Vintage, 2004), 111.

> ness of the supreme one, or of icons, where god is depicted in human form?[29]

Arguments appealing to contradictions in biblical mythology often seems to offer the simplest way to prove the thesis being pursued:

> Some answered: "god is depicted on the icon, but whether he exists or not, who knows such things?" Particular difficulty is encountered by believers, when you *force them to consider*[30] the question of where god exists.[31] Some time ago, it was clear for them that god—the creator of all things—resided in the heavenly firmament, above the clouds. How is that possible now, when space flights are being carried out? When answering questions about god's place of residence, the third and fourth groups find themselves in a better position: "they answer that the cosmonauts did not see god because god is a non-sensible, invisible spirit."[32] The first two groups hold on to the view that the god-trinity, or god, which is deemed to be a concrete being, stands in a relation of direct and irreconcilable contradiction to technical-scientific progress. They either declare the flights of the cosmonauts to be an atheist fabrication, and do not believe in their genuineness, or they resettle god into places not yet accessible to cosmonauts. They say that "cosmonauts flew low, and because of that they did not see god," "god is in seventh heaven, and cosmonauts only orbit around Earth," while some admit directly that the question of god's dwelling place is difficult for them, saying that god is in the air, but where, exactly, they don't in fact know.[33]

From the beginning of the 1960s through to the 1980s, a great deal of attention was paid to producing a typological analysis of religiosity in the population. Along with this, the novel notion that a comprehensive "atheization of the population" could somehow be accomplished was introduced. The typology and measurements of the level of religiosity were required in order to manifestly demonstrate the dynamics of a supposedly

29. See note 33.

30. That is, direct their thoughts towards those aspects of the issue they are required to discuss. (Authors' emphasis.)

31. The most "grave" argument in the proofs of God's nonexistence in heavens emerged after human space flights. The researchers failed to realize the naïvely mythical nature of their own world-view, presupposed in their adoption of this kind of argumentative basis.

32. The quotation marks reproduced in this quote do not appear in an entirely logical form in the archival material adduced here (editor's note).

33. RGASPI F. 606, inventory no. 4, dep. 41, 8.

ever swifter transition from the last remaining "vestiges" of rudimentary religiosity to conscious unbelief. That atheism is a necessary, generally valid, stage in the development of social consciousness, raised no doubts—at least, no official doubts. Sociology of religion should have been brought into play to validate this thesis, to count how many believers or hesitant people remained, and to identify exactly what socio-demographic factors might be holding back progress in this regard. The hallmark of the typologies of those years was, above all, their focus on numerically assessing the dynamic character of the changes that were expected to take place. The surveys recorded these transitional steps from religion to atheism, which were genuinely observable in the society. Alongside those typologies specifically intended for investigating religiosity there existed broader typologies, locating a maximal involvement in religious activities at one pole and a maximum of atheistic conviction at the other. Moreover, the typologies themselves varied to reflect variations in the fundamental characteristics of the objects under scrutiny. For instance, there were typologies that took into account only the facts of religious consciousness, or only the religious conduct, or both of them. The most important task connected with the carrying out of such surveys was that of disclosing the "propagandists" of religion and obstructing their activity—and this by any suitable means, either through atheistic propaganda or via upbringing. All these typologies were marked by the evident fact that nobody involved in drawing them was prepared in principle to detected in faith an expression of a genuine human psychological need, or of some "archetypal" element of what it means to be human, so that religiosity was instead regarded in every case merely as an annoying obstacle erected by an ignorant or superstitious consciousness—one that stood in the way of proper comprehensive education and scientific materialism.

Below, a number of typologies are adduced to show the multiple facets of religious consciousness that, in one way or another, came to be reflected in this kind of sociology, even as effective methods of propaganda aimed at instilling atheistic attitudes and mindsets ever more deeply into society were, at the very same time, being searched for.

As our first examples of such typologies, we shall adduce the conception of Alexey S. Onishchenko, who divided believers into three groupings, and then went on to identify nine types of religiosity.

Group I: Believers whose consciousness is influenced to a significant extent by religion:

1) Fanatics exhibiting blind belief in their spiritual leaders. They consider

serving god to be the sense of their lives. They reject all worldly goods, and may sometimes go so far as to immolate themselves.

2) Theoreticians-theologians, i.e. the trained parts of clergy of all denominations, busying themselves with the justification of religious dogmas and observances and engaged in devising effective methods of religious propagandizing.
3) Ordinary believers, internally convinced of the truth and nobility of their views. These presume that religion consists, in the main, of morality. They read religious literature, visit a church or a house of prayer regularly, respect religious holidays and observances on a regular basis, and pray every day.

Group II: Believers in whose consciousness religion does not really occupy much of a place at all:

1) Hesitant believers—one frequently hears them making such declarations as "I do and I don't believe." They do not much believe in the dogmas and myths of the sacred books but, for various reasons (an insufficient level of learning, traditions, indecisiveness, etc.), they have not completely lost their faith in god, and nor have they conclusively broken off their links to religious organizations. They observe the principal religious holidays and ceremonies, but they do not attach any significance to the mystical side of their observances.
2) Non-professing believers, in the sense of people who preserve certain remnants of non-confessional forms of religiosity (healers, enchanters, fortune-tellers, etc.). These do not profess christianity itself, but do believe in the existence of some dark, supernatural and / or superhuman forces. There are many superstitions linked to their faith, while their religious representations are insignificant and do not display any kind of system. In everyday life, they do not manifest their faith in supernatural powers. item[3)] Devotees of the faith of the future, disenchanted by the forms of religion known to them, but not yet having arrived at complete unbelief. These presume that a kind of faith should exist. Their theses is well known: religions are the faith of the past, and atheism is the faith of the present (but they consider atheism unacceptable to them), while the faith of the future is yet to be discovered.

Group III: Believers associated in some way with a church or a sect, but only to an insignificant degree. Many of them appear to be, in point of fact, non-believers.

1) Believers by tradition, whose religiosity has the character of a purely external display. These observe ecclesiastical rituals alongside non-religious, folk-based ones. They do not presume to issue judgments

about god or issues of faith. Asked about why they adhere to religion, they will just reply that they do not want to break with the traditions of their fathers and forefathers.

2) The religiously "insured," who are not, in fact, believers. These in principle observe two rites: baptisms and funerals. They may deliberate, for instance, like this: "We do not know whether there is a god or not. If there is no god, but we ask him to intervene on behalf of a child or a dead person, this will not do any harm, but if there is a god, it could help. In the former case we lose nothing, in the latter, we only stand to gain." These people are situated between believers and non-believers.
3) Faceless believers are those not attached to any single religion, who nevertheless still think there is some kind of natural force that created the world and rules it. In everyday life, they conduct themselves as non-believers do.[34]

Another typology was proposed by Nikolay P. Alexeyev, who recommended adopting two criteria when seeking to distinguish between believers and atheists: the intensity of one's active expression of one's attitude to religion, and one's evaluation of the consistency of one's religious views. After having divided respondents into three groups (believers, hesitant respondents, non-believers), he eventually came up with a typology composed of ten groupings:[35]

I. Believers.
   1) Believers who are active and consistent in their religious views.
   2) Active yet inconsistent believers.
   3) Believers who are passive in their religious attitudes, but consistent in their religious views.
   4) Believers who are both passive and inconsistent.

II. Hesitant respondents.
   5) Believers hesitating between faith and unbelief, but consistent in respect of what they would believe in.
   6) Believers who are both hesitant and inconsistent.

34. This quotation is an amalgamation of sentences drawn from a more detailed discussion in Vladimir D. Kobetskiy, "Issledovanie dinamiki religioznosti naseleniya v SSSR," in *Ateizm, religiya, sovremennost'*, ed. V. N. Sherdakov (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973), 128–29. Elision marks have been omitted for the sake of clarity. The formatting here is that proposed by the editor.

35. Cf. N. P. Alekseev, "Metodika i rezul'taty izucheniya sel'skogo naseleniya (na materialakh Orlovskoy oblasti)," *Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma* no. 3 (1967), 134–36.

III. Non-believers.
   7) Non-believers who are passive and inconsistent in their anti-religious views.
   8) Non-believers who are passive, yet consistent in their views on religion.
   9) Non-believers who are active and consistent in their convictions.
   10) Active and consistent non-believers.

The typology developed by Remir A. Lopatkin, Anatoliy A. Lebedev, Victor G. Pivivarov, and others, deserves particular attention. This typology encompasses:

1) convinced believers engaged in spreading religious propaganda;
2) convinced believers who do not engage in religious propaganda;
3) ordinary believers whose religiosity is not conspicuously manifested;
4) hesitant people;
5) people indifferent to the problems of religion and atheism;
6) non-believers;
7) convinced atheists.[36]

Attempts at creating a typology of believers held a central place amongst the activities of the Institute of Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union throughout the 1960s. In this context, one may find the minutes of the discussions concerning the proper criteria for religiosity and the correct typology of believers, conducted by the Institute of Scientific Atheism, to be of interest.[37] This, for instance, is what Vusya A. Chernyak, a faculty member at the Institute of Philosophy of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences, had to say:

> As a matter of fact, it is absolutely impossible to produce any materially effective outcome in concrete social investigations without a scientific typology, where this latter furnishes the premise for grouping the material which we obtain as a result of the concretely-sociological inquiry.[38]

36. Pavel K. Kurochkin, ed., *K obshchestvu, svobodnomu ot religii: Process sekulyarizatsii v usloviyakh sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva*, (Moscow: Mysl', 1970), 135–49.
37. RGASPI F. 606, inventory no. 4, dep. 80, 6.
38. Ibid., 6.6.

Chernyak himself has marked off three types of respondents: those negatively, neutrally, and positively inclined to a religious world-view.[39] Mitrofan K. Teplyakov insisted, in turn, that there was a need to distinguish *types of atheists*. He himself distinguished the following types: atheist, convinced non-believer, religious agnostic, hesitant person, convinced believer, and fanatic.[40]

During conferences and symposia, many problems were raised, proposals of various kinds were put forward, disagreements were voiced, and an atmosphere of dissatisfaction was evident. It was considered necessary to establish a connection between theory and practice, to deal with the real difficulties in understanding believers that arose from discrepancies between believers' declarations and their actual conduct, between religious consciousness and religious behavior. At the aforementioned conference, the propagandist R .S. Boltanov pointed, for instance, to the insufficiently clear formulation of the categories believers were divided into:

> Research data shows that even when approached just for the first time, some people declare themselves to be believers while observing the rites, others declare themselves to be non-believers while not observing the rites, and still others declare themselves to be non-believers, but still observe the rites.[41]

Vusya A. Chernyak doubted, in principle, that scientific methods were applicable to the study of spiritual life and issues pertaining to one's world-view (which amounted to a covert criticism of the ideologization of the sciences). The propagandist A. F. Yarygin brought up the question of the practical application of scientific ideas, drawing attention to an example taken from his own practice: during one year, he had worked with two female believers, a Baptist and an Orthodox Christian, convincing them to reject religion. After one year, the Orthodox woman abandoned religion and, he said, "does not feel any sinfulness before God." The Baptist, however, continued to have doubts, even though the methods of propagandizing were the same in all respects. The researcher posed the following question for the conference participants:

39. Ibid., 6.9–10.17.

40. Ibid., 6.19.

41. This observation corresponds to the terms used to refer to believers in contemporary Russian sociology of religion: "en-churched believers," "purely-formal believers," and "ritual believers." In the 1960s, a more ideologized justification was required in order to be able to establish a classification.

> What type of believer is this?

As the hall "answered with laughter," Yarygin went on

> For you, it is a laughable matter, but for practical purposes it something to cry about. . . . Not until you have determined both the theoretical type of the believer and the practical knowledge of the type of the believer will you have in your possession a correct approach and method—so give us, the practical workers, a possibility of working with believers and give us materials.[42]

The contradictions between the religious beliefs and the religious conduct of the respondents, which were thus brought to light, deserve particular attention. An incident, recounted by the propagandist E. Duluman tells us a lot in this regard.

> I will adduce such an example: A group left for Cherkasy Oblast, heading for the village called Belozer'e.[43] I myself settled in at the home of a young male believer (they told me that he was a believer), but without disclosing the fact of my being an atheist. I was not carrying out atheistic work, but still, I saw that one could hardly sense even the slightest whiff of religiosity there. At night, they would sit down and play cards under the icons. I suffered this for three nights, as I could see no relationship between the cards and god, and then I asked: "Why do you play cards under those icons, there?" They answered: "We find it very convenient over there!" I said that even so, it is god that is painted there, and the host answered: "Well, they've got used to it!" ⟨*Laughter in the hall*⟩. They said they do not believe in god. I asked: "But do you go to church?" They answered: "Everyone goes, and we go!" "Have you baptized the baby?" "Everyone baptizes, and we have baptized!" I started lecturing them that this is savagery, that only savages observe this kind of rite, etc. The host listened attentively and said that this was interesting to listen to, but then declared that "everyone's a savage, and I'm a savage too." ⟨*Laughter in the hall*⟩. I knew he did not like the priest, so I asked: "How

42. Viktoriya Smolkin, "«Svyato mesto pusto ne byvaet»: ateisticheskoe vospitanie v Sovetskom Soyuze, 1964–1968," *Neprikosnovenny zapas: debaty o politike i kul'ture* 65, no. 3 (2009): 36–52.

43. Today it is Bilozir'ya (In Ukrainian: Білозір'я; in Russian: Белозорье) in the Cherkas'ka oblast of Ukraine. In the passage quoted here, square brackets mark the editor's additions, while angle brackets set off the translated additions of the person who wrote down the conference minutes (editor's note).

much did you pay the priest?" He said that the priest was a sponger, that everything went to his pocket, and that he had baptized a child and given a three-ruble note to the [parish] cashbox and two rubles to the priest. I said: "You gave five rubles to a swindler," and the host answered, "Let him choke!" I started appealing to his parental feelings: that how so, that you [sic!] could dip the baby in cold water? The host came back with the following reply: "We arranged it with the priest, he warmed the water up!" I continued that it was unsanitary, that there would have been bacteria in the water, that you exposed the child to the danger of falling sick or becoming infected, but he asked: "And have they baptized you?" I said: "They have." He declared: "And they have baptized me! They have actually baptized the whole of Mother-Russia, and see how tall she has grown!" ⟨*Joyful animation, laughter.*⟩[44]

This example seems extremely interesting to us, not only because it shows the weaknesses of the atheists' argumentation and the strength of people's faith in tradition, but also as the personal story of a cynical believer who was able, with such ease, to "cut the propagandist down to size."[45] From what has been recounted above one can arrive at a sense of just how incompetent the agitators' approach to their work was. It may be added here that they would also have encountered responses like the following:

"We did not start it, we do not bring it to an end. . . . Let us live in peace, and we will not engage in any agitation." Among middle-aged women one may encounter arguments of this kind: "Religiosity was not a source of trouble for our parents and ancestors, and nor will it be one for us."[46]

We can thus see that theoreticians and practical workers were not speaking the same language. The assignment that science was meant to accomplish, in terms of strengthening the position of the agitator and the propagandist as regards the efficiency with which they performed their tasks, was doomed to fail. For science, even with the best will in the world, could not, at one and the same time, have executed the order given it by the party—namely to convert the population to atheism—and studied its "sub-

44. RGASPI F. 606, inventory no. 4, dep. 80, 6.53–56.

45. We wish here to call to the reader's attention an analogous account, offered in an artistic form in Vassily Shukshin's short story "Cutting Them Down to Size" [Srezal]. For an English translation, see Vasily Shukshin, *Stories from a Siberian Village*, trans. John Givens and Laura Michael (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).

46. RGASPI F. 606, inventory no. 4, dep. 53, 6.40.

ject" objectively. This contradiction stemmed from the ideologization of science, which involved the presupposition that the religious relics of the past can, in principle, be eliminated. The rare moment of theory being unified with practice may actually be observed, during this time, where practical workers forced the methodologists to elaborate conceptions which were practical in real life, and to avoid ideological generalizations and pure speculation. Particular attention was paid by the Institute of Scientific Atheism to individual work with believers. Today, one could compare this approach to the qualitative methods elaborated in sociology.

> A female Party member, also a member of a departmental committee,[47] was attached to a certain female baptist, in order to work with her. For the party member, the work could never have been a mere exchange of words. She started coming up to the atheist and saying that I [sic!], as a member of the departmental committee, am officially announcing to you that there is no god. Then, after some time, she would return and ask: "Well, have you already rejected this delusion, or not?" Eventually, either the baptist had had enough of this or someone had given her some advice, and she went straight to the City Committee[48] and requested that they separate this atheist from her.[49]

> There was such a case: we gathered the secretaries of Party cells, and assigned one member the task of carrying out work with a believer, and he came to her with a half-liter bottle of vodka! We analyzed this case at the ideological commission.[50]

The necessity of renouncing purely "enlightening" work, of employing a more differentiated approach to believers, depending on their age, profession, education, gender, social or national identity, and, obviously, confession, had already become obvious during this period. The tension between the descriptive and prescriptive functions of the Institute of Scientific Atheism—i.e. between science and ideology, or between the empirical research activities of the Institute and its ideological task in determining religious policies—was becoming even more apparent. Empirical sociology and its qualitative methods were revealing themselves to be doomed,

47. The Russian word "цехком" refers to the executive committee of a trade union at departmental level (editor's note).

48. Of the Communist Party, in this case (editor's note).

49. RGASPI F. 606, inventory no. 4, dep. 53, 6.10.

50. Ibid., 6.83.

once science had been ideologized. One may surmise that this tension was merely a symptom of broader contradictions in the Soviet approach to religion and atheistic education. The way in which the institutes were established and their workers nominated,[51] the fact that these workers were required, on the one hand, to carry out a study of religious moods in the population but, on the other, also to conduct atheist propaganda in the locations they were studying, all the while demonstrating that the propaganda methods were effective, basically meant that those workers were required *a priori* to accomplish two opposing things: to accurately describe Soviet believers and, at the very same time, to turn them into atheists. In spite of this, and undeterred by all limitations, sociological investigations and philosophical theories gradually came to embrace new theoretical contents.

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51. One could not even respond to a job announcement in such an institution, let alone be offered employment there, without a competition. The workers were officially nominated, much as the US President nominates Federal Judges (editor's note).

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