

to another person, performs acts peculiar to an occupation for which he is not duly qualified shall be liable to a penalty of imprisonment for three months to one year or to a fine of 100 to 300 units, or both.

They are also liable to the penalties laid down in article 197 of the Code, which states

Any person who, on any pretext, incites others not to accept medical attention for themselves or their relatives or to reject measures relating to preventive medicine shall be liable to a penalty of imprisonment for 3 months to one year or to a fine of 100 to 300 units, or both.

It should be noted that all the penalties laid down in the above-mentioned articles of the Criminal

Code referring to one form or another of religious activity were increased in the latest amendment, adopted on 30 December 1987.

Finally, the opportunities for religious believers to practise and communicate their religion will always be restricted and controlled as a result of the continuous materialist and atheistic campaign of the state, as made clear in article 61 of the Constitution:

None of the freedoms accorded to citizens may be exercised contrary to what is established in the Constitution and the law, or contrary to the existence and objectives of the Socialist State, or contrary to the decision of the Cuban people to build socialism and communism. Violations of this principle are punishable by law.

## Soviet Atheism — The Great Debate

*In January 1989 the atheist monthly Nauka i religiya (Science and Religion) published an article on atheist work entitled 'Re-evaluation'. Written by V. I. Garadzha, director of the Communist Party's Institute of Scientific Atheism, it questioned the validity and effectiveness of many aspects of atheist work in the Soviet Union. This article and the later responses, which we print in part below, suggest that the role of religion and atheism in Soviet society is being given some serious public thought for the first time since the mid-1960s.*

### Atheist Work: A Re-evaluation

Today it seems that no-one would question the need for a radical review of the whole system of atheist

education. The CPSU Programme passed at the 27th Party Conference, the 19th All-Union Party Conference, the series of party and state documents passed in connection with the celebrations of the millennium of the Christianisation of Rus', the complex processes of *perestroika* in the political, economic and social spheres — all of these present us with new and urgent tasks. To a large extent, the resolution of these depends on a reappraisal of our own views on the theory and practice of atheism. The methods currently employed in atheist work are not only ineffective, but full of serious moral, spiritual and political shortcomings.

*Perestroika* in the sphere of social consciousness and public opinion is now happening at such a pace that we are forced to re-evaluate not only old attitudes but also opinions held only

yesterday. This should not be a source of shame or surprise. For an academic there is nothing worse than clinging to mistaken views that are divorced from the realities of life. We must break down the established dogmas which are preventing us from looking with a fresh and sober eye at the theory and practice of atheism, its history, methods of propaganda and at the system of atheist education.

In order to do this it is necessary first to isolate those stereotypes which are preventing us from progressing on the road to restructuring and renewal.

Where should we look in the first instance? To begin with we need a critical evaluation of many of the established attitudes towards religion in our literature, of our assessment of religious consciousness, and of our attitudes towards believers. Secondly, we must accurately determine the theoretical bases and premises of atheism; we should get to grips with its history, paying especial attention to the stage reached by Marxism-Leninism, including the distortions occasioned by well known circumstances. A critical analysis of these two aspects will enable us to determine a restructuring of atheist education.

Obviously it is impossible within the pages of a single article or even a substantial monograph to solve all these problems in one fell swoop. I merely want to put forward a number of hypotheses.

In my opinion, the very fact that religion continues to exist in a socialist society demands a new theoretical approach. Up until now we have had a simplified, 'one track' attitude towards the evolution of religion under conditions of socialism. We believed that with the end of exploitation and the removal of conflict in society would naturally follow a deepening 'crisis situation' in the

area of religion, a 'narrowing down of its sphere of influence', leading eventually to a rapid extinction of religion as a social phenomenon.[. . .]

Such an assumption to a large extent reflects the general condition of the theoretical study of socialism in the social sciences. Take note: not a single of the disciplines in the social sciences seeking to analyse the legal, economic and social aspects of socialism pays any attention to the role and function of religion in society. It is as if religion does not exist in the minds of sociologists and political scientists. Or, if it features at all, it is only as an insignificant phenomenon which can be neglected because of its minor role which will become more and more limited with the passage of time, leading to eventual extinction. Not one academic treatise devoted to the theory of socialism (its socio-economic, political, spiritual and developmental aspects) carries any reference to religion in a socialist society. [. . .] If it has been decreed that the stage of 'advanced socialism' will not be attained until religion has been defeated once and for all, then the measure of success of socialism is in direct proportion to the lessening of religious influence in society and to a decline in the number of believers.

In a very real way, for believers the victory of socialism signifies the destruction of their faith. In that case why work conscientiously, why be involved in society if that brings the day of 'atheist socialism' that much nearer?

It is clear that such 'ideological safeguards setting up 'good atheists' against 'bad believers' has in practice undermined social unity in the struggle for the ideals of socialism and communism, thus demobilising and alienating significant groups in society.

The establishment of this kind of conflict between believers and unbel-

ievers, the negative evaluation of the religious factor as a hindrance in the further development of a socialist society has brought its own sorry results. Anything which encouraged the existence of religion in our society was seen to be the result of outmoded attitudes, petit bourgeois psychology, bureaucracy, and nationalism, on which religion is said to thrive. Religion, as the 'opium of the people', is an entirely reactionary force which hinders the development of society and which allegedly sows seeds of negativity and social passivity among its followers. As a result, the actual social and political stance of a particular church or religious organisation was totally disregarded and religion seen to be not only an alien phenomenon, but one antagonistic to the ideals, politics, way of life and morality of socialism.

It is both senseless and ludicrous to suggest that religion is the biggest hindrance to the development of a socialist society. Now that the real causes of the time of stagnation are clear, the error of such judgements is obvious. To see religion, which is just one social element, as the root of all evil, is to fall into idealist one-sidedness. Marxism put an end to this illusion: religion is not the cause, but a factor reinforcing a narrow world outlook.

Party and state documents after April 1985, scholarly analyses of the progress of *perestroika*, *glasnost* and democratisation have established the real reasons for social apathy which is not due to 'the outmoded attitudes of believers' nor to 'religious prejudices'. The real reasons go far deeper, to basic mechanisms in society which have been distorted by the personality cult and the years of stagnation. Huge numbers of people were uprooted and alienated from creative, socially useful activity. This alienation dealt an immeasurable blow to the morality and spirituality

of the people. This is the root of drunkenness on a large scale, social apathy, drug addiction. This is the reason for the tendency to retreat into an 'inner emigration' and into perhaps more extreme forms of religious belief. More often than not people fell into a spiritual void. Religion is indeed linked with the problem of social apathy, but what is less clear is the nature of this link.

The existing stereotypes in atheist thinking corresponded fully to the spirit of those times when the masses were promised quick results. Miracles were expected in every area of social life. The biologist Lysenko promised a total revolution, an abundance of agricultural foods. Likewise atheist education had its own Lysenkos, who somehow believed that with the wave of a metaphorical magic wand believers would become atheists. They were zealous 'destroyers of faith'. They considered religion to be an alien class phenomenon, a remnant of the 'accursed past', from a world which merited its total destruction as a 'servant of capitalism' teaching spiritual, moral, and political ideals which were an alternative to socialism. A new society, they believed, would not create the conditions which breed religion and it would, moreover, not need the assistance of religion. So if religion continues to exist it follows that they did not 'look into the matter' did not 'pay due attention'. Religion had to be firmly dealt with — and deal with it they did.

It is now generally known that the mass terror of the Stalinist era affected the church and believers. Neither did atheists remain unscathed — the executioner's axe fell indiscriminately. The pressure on the church lessened only during the Great Patriotic War. However, in the 1960s certain ideological and political views were prevalent in the party —

that is, that we were ready to make a significant step towards communism. It was clear that there was no room for a religious factor in society and as a result administrative pressure was brought to bear. In the late '50s and early '60s churches, mosques and prayer houses were closed, religious organisations were stripped of their registration using any pretext or none at all. This led to a reaction in the opposite extreme: a growth in religious fanaticism and extremism. In the period 1950-64 on average up to 420 Orthodox churches were closed annually (cf. 1965-74:48, 1975-87:22).

During these years our propaganda was geared to demonstrate the harmfulness of religion. Religion was blamed for the losses incurred to society by mass absenteeism and drunkenness during church festivals; religion, as an anti-scientific world view 'clouds', 'poisons' (sometimes even 'corrupts') the consciousness of Soviet people, preventing their active participation in socialist production and in society as a whole.

For this reason believers were not considered worthy of commendation at work, even when they quite obviously deserved recognition. If they did receive approval for their work it was usually with some qualification: so and so has managed to free himself from the fetters of religious prejudice. Such propaganda produced a negative reaction in those whose task it was to assess people's attitudes to production work. All of this sowed seeds of distrust for atheist propaganda and caused a negative shift in social consciousness.

Up until very recently religion was seen as harmful because it was only religion that publicly preached 'a bourgeois ideology', for some reason tolerated in our otherwise ideologically sound society. But why bourgeois? After all, the religious worldview was formulated long before the advent of a capitalist society. Is it

because religion is seen here to be a legacy of tsarism? Or because religion is sometimes used by bourgeois politicians for ends which are hostile to socialism?

State institutions such as the army, the legal system, spheres of social activity such as law and morality are also a legacy of the old order. We may have modified the substance but as social phenomena they have been preserved and even strengthened. As for the political aims the church may have served in any given period of history, each case needs to be examined independently. And if we really look at the realities of political life then we will find not only clerical anti-communism but also the participation of clerics in the anti-imperialist struggle for the social and national liberation of the peoples of Latin America and of many oriental countries, including those which have embarked on a course of socialist development. Many church leaders, it is well known, are active in the campaign for nuclear disarmament; they support the aims and the slogans promoting socialism. One could also mention the activity of the church in promoting 'green' policies, progress and democracy.

This begs the question: can such activity really be seen as harmful and contradictory to the interests of peace and socialism? A correct evaluation of the role of religion in today's complex world cannot be made, in my opinion, in terms of a series of simple alternatives, i.e. is religion useful or harmful, or in the interests of socialism? Incidentally, it is precisely this kind of position which certain publications insist on encouraging (for example the article in *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 'Tak chem zhe polezna religiya', 'What use is religion?') At one time our institute promoted just such an approach and its publications displayed a similar bias. Never mind —

it is high time these views were reassessed!

The practicalities of day-to-day political life show that religion is used for various ends. Some of these are hostile to the ideals of socialism. Others are neutral in terms of their fundamental ideals and values. But taken as a whole, religion is in no way hostile either to our social system or to communist aspirations. Moreover, religion can and does offer practical support to our domestic and foreign policies (just take a look at today's realities!). Not to mention the spiritual and moral spheres where religion is traditionally strong. Can one really say that some of the moral precepts preached from the pulpit contradict those which we are trying to instil in the Soviet people? Ministers of the church as well as atheists are engaged in the struggle against drunkenness and drug addiction, crime and alcoholism, against the dislocation of moral values.

While taking a firm stance against any attempt to use religion in a way that is harmful to our society and to the individual, we should not identify religion solely with such activity, neither should we seek to deny its specific positive functions in the life of a socialist society, nor should we deny the necessity for unity between believers and atheists in the struggle for the renewal of socialism. It is only natural that the church and society should have differing ideological bases and reasons for engaging in such activity. But the aims are the same! The realities of life in our country today demonstrate that atheists are losing out if they refuse the help and support of the clergy of various confessions in moral education, by exalting communist morality over and above universal human values which are affirmed in the teachings of many religions, assimilated over thousands of years in the

development of world civilisation.

It is understandable that the process of change in our understanding of the essence and meaning of atheism and of our attitudes towards religion is difficult and will not be worked out immediately. Unfortunately we have become used to often mistaken stereotyped views. To reject them is sometimes seen as tantamount to admitting that all our efforts in the previous stages of development in society were all meaningless and in vain. We have all lived in a specific social system, have all experienced similar attitudes towards religion and the church. But life itself has changed and *perestroika* has affected our outlook most of all. The demands of new thinking mean that we should reject outmoded dogmas and decaying stereotypes, we should re-examine questions which only yesterday seemed fundamental and immutable. The more quickly we embark on such a re-evaluation the more successful will be our restructuring of atheist work.

I repeat, *perestroika* should affect not only attitudes towards religion, but our appraisal of atheism itself and the, now rejected but previously universally accepted, view that in the spiritual domain of society there exist two opposing forces: atheism and religion. Where one gains the other loses. . . . But if we think about it, what kind of atheism is it that presents itself as some kind of creed opposed to religion? Some kind of substitute for religion, an 'anti-religion'? Did not the classics of Marxism warn against this very form of atheism when they said that an atheism which exists solely on the denial of religion itself remains within the framework of religious consciousness, replacing religious intolerance with atheist intolerance. When this happens, atheism becomes its own kind of faith. Do we need an atheism which has taken on board

the characteristics of a religious outlook? [ . . . ]

In this context we should say a few words about the history of atheism. The earliest form of atheism was simply a denial of the gods — an idea carried in the word itself. As a simple denial of faith in God, godlessness is also a form of religious faith. It may have different values but it is still a faith — that is, a manifestation of religious consciousness. Many suggest that the difference inherent in Marxist atheism is that it not only denies the existence of God but goes one step further by putting man in his place. This has been extrapolated from the earliest writings of Marx in 1844 and has for a long time been attributed to him and, by implication, to Marxism. That is, Marxism places man in the place of God as an affirmation of humanism. In actual fact, this statement is totally inaccurate. Karl Marx in this instance was not talking about his own position but was citing Feuerbach, who maintained that the denial of religion was the means, the spring-board for the affirmation of man and the triumph of humanism. Such a form of atheism would bring about a liberation of man in the sphere of theory, in the alteration of outlook. Marxism, however, sees a different means of attaining this liberation — that is by a revolutionary transformation of society itself, not by a denial of God, but by a denial of the validity of private property, pooling private wealth for mass production. The theoretical humanism of Feuerbach was replaced by the practical humanism of Marxist communism.

In historical terms, religion will die out with the establishment of socialism. As socialism and communism progress so religion will be on the decline, not because religion is bad per se and must therefore be wiped out at all costs, but because communism represents a radical change in

and renewal of society, of social structures, of the organisation and regulation of social life, of man himself. Religion will become obsolete in the same way that Marx envisages that with time statehood and all forms of political activity will die out. The policies conducted by a socialist state towards the church are not 'atheism in action' and are not necessarily based on the Marxist understanding of religion in society. Lenin's Decree of 1918 regarding the separation of church and state and church and school was not a declaration of war on religion to bring about its destruction; he was merely determining the parameters within which religion would exist in a socialist state. According to the Leninist understanding, the task of atheist propaganda was to break the link between religion and the exploiting classes, to wake the masses from their religious 'hibernation' and to encourage a thought out approach to religion.

That is a genuinely scholarly approach to the substance of atheism and its role in the building of socialism. It is obvious that it differs radically from the understanding of atheism which has been disseminated over many years. In the 1920s we departed from the Marxist understanding and returned to Feuerbach's theories, greatly distorted and vulgarised. Atheism was set within the framework of the 'theory' of an increased class struggle in the progression towards the victory of socialism. One could quote from Trotsky, Stalin, Bukharin, Yaroslavsky and others, for whom the Marxist idea that atheism would eventually become the norm for human thought in an age of communism was replaced by another: that atheism should fight religion as an alien class phenomenon. The expectation of instant miracles, peaceful revolution and the beginning of the era of communism

characteristic of those years coloured many attitudes and emphases in the understanding of the development of society. You had only to put your shoulder to the wheel, make a concerted effort and capitalism would die a death not at the end of the 20th century but by the end of the 1920s, which would naturally entail the death of religion.

The psychology of the Proletcult, the expectation of immediate and decisive action reigned not only in the practice of anti-religious policies but in the theory of atheism. This must be openly and fully acknowledged, displaying no mercy towards previously unquestioned views. The concept of an increased class struggle in the period of the building of socialism conceived and put into practice during the lifetime of Stalin had an effect not only on attitudes towards the church, religion and believers, but on our very understanding of atheism. A difference on the level of conflicting worldviews was channelled into the stream of political confrontation. Our task today is to purge atheism of its vulgar manifestations and distortions and to re-establish a truly Marxist interpretation. [ . . . ]

Thus we come to the third stage of restructuring: a re-orientation of practical aims and the reorganisation of atheist work. [ . . . ] We have at last realised that religion is one of those phenomena which will be a fellow traveller on the road to restructuring of our society on the basis of genuine democracy, *glasnost*' and socialism. [ . . . ] We must realise that religion and the church will be part of our lives for a long time to come, that our attitudes must change, and not with every changing whim as some would like to think. We should have a sober, Marxist attitude towards the church and religion, assessing them as certain secondary phenomena in the broad social base. There are

certain other phenomena which we are seeking to use, strengthen and develop. For example, we want to establish a law governed state, so we are improving the theory and practice of law. We are seeking to improve the work of the organs governing law and order. *Perestroika* is being conducted in the army, strengthening the defence capabilities of our country. *Perestroika* is taking place in the party in an effort to make it the vanguard of political opinion and the leader of the people.

For all of this to happen it is essential to have a constructive dialogue with believers and the church. The conditions for this dialogue were, in essence, created by Lenin's Decree on the separation of church and state and school and church. The history of the church and, indeed, the history of atheism after the revolution, needs to be seen in this context. The relationships between believers and atheists, church and state need to be fully analysed and interpreted from the standpoint of *perestroika*, so that believers have no grounds for accusing atheists of inertia and soullessness, of dogmatism and intolerance.

Let us recall a recent situation linked with the millennium celebrations. Some atheists were indignant because as far as they understood it, a strictly church anniversary was being celebrated as if it were an event of great socio-political and historicocultural significance. They saw this as a concession to the church and were ready to accuse the party of 'flirting with religion' and pandering to the wishes of the clergy.

In fact we are not ignoring the deep contradictions that exist between Marxism and religion and we are not denying the opportunity for a truly academic and scientific critique of religious views. Religion presents us with an ideological confrontation which must be understood in terms

of an honest juxtaposition of spiritual values and ideals. It is a confrontation which should not be seen by either side as an unquestioned right to a monopoly of the truth.

In the practicalities of daily life there is so much common ground between believers and atheists that it is unthinkable and harmful to seek to set up divisions between them. The restructuring of atheist education should run precisely along the lines of promoting unity between atheists and believers, of encouraging the consolidation of all forces in society to work towards a solution of social, economic and political problems. Obviously the reform of the law on religion and cults should also take this into account.

This third area of *perestroika* in atheist education is certainly not easy and perhaps even more difficult than the first two. But here also we must act decisively, breaking away from

established dogmas, forms of propaganda and organisation.

The ideas I have put forward must be seen as an invitation to discussion and debate, without which it will be impossible to progress. Atheism in its present state is like a boat caught in a force nine gale, tossed about by the waves. Its crew, however, is unable to take any action which might save them, and is waiting for the order to come from above. It is time that we rid ourselves of our chains and embark on a programme of decisive measures in restructuring atheist education.

V. Garadzha,  
Director of the Institute of Scientific  
Atheism attached to the Academy  
of Social Sciences of the CPSU  
Central Committee.

*Nauka i religiya (Science and Religion)*, 1989 No. 1, pp. 2-5.

### Readers Respond

Garadzha's hardhitting article, which raised important questions about the role and place of religion in the general renewal of all spheres of social activity, covering the state of atheist education, the current level of those academic disciplines which cover this field, brought in a flood of letters from our readers. Letters came from people of all walks of life, workers and pensioners, believers and atheists, those wavering between religious faith and a rejection of religion. It is only natural that when we are dealing with the re-evaluation of something which is so important opinions are of the most varied kind. We are publishing some of these responses here.

I have a secondary education; I am 50 years old and consider myself to

be an unbeliever, a doubter. Allow me to offer my opinions about this article. The end of the article reads: 'It is time that we . . . embarked on a programme of decisive measures in restructuring atheist education'. I find the word 'decisive' rather disturbing. If religion is supposed to die out with the attainment of communism, if society is to undergo radical change and renewal, then why 100 years before the attainment of communism do we battle against religion so furiously, with so much difficulty and so little result? And why is religion seen to be particularly harmful to socialism? In developed, prosperous countries people pray and build churches at the same time as having intensive farming, consumer goods, sufficient levels of production, excellent education and medical care.



Somewhere it is said that a belief in God will take people into a world of illusions, away from reality and struggle. But is not the 'radiant future' which has been promised us for so long also an illusion?

It says in the article that religion and the church will be with us for a long time to come. Very well said. We should work with the church in the area of the moral rehabilitation of our country. By all means have your baby baptised, only make sure that there are no detention centres for juvenile delinquents; let people marry in church — and live like human beings, so that later on they are not stripped of their parental rights, so that there are no abandoned children. It is in these areas that decisive action is needed. And the campaign against religion can wait a good 50 or 100 years. At the moment it is difficult to convince believers. There are hundreds of problems which we do not know how to solve: no soap, no sugar, vodka-related problems, human rights, corruption among the cotton growers, Stalinist concentration camps, pollution in the Aral Sea. I am only too well acquainted with these. In order to solve them you must be all things to all men: an economist, a lawyer, an historian, an ecologist, and a politician. It will be a hard job re-educating people.

Ye. I. Avdeyeva  
Dnepropetrovsk

I cannot agree with the statements made by the author of the article, nor with the increasingly accepted opinion that religion (or Orthodoxy at the very least) is the embodiment and the main preserver of moral values. I cannot understand where this view comes from. The Bible is not the only ancient text which has survived to the present day. Myths, legends, fairy-

tales and other elements in our past heritage display just as much wisdom and as many golden rules for living. Over the centuries the most brilliant human minds (including those among the clergy) have exposed the moral testimony of the church to be hypocrisy.

Probably it is not worth our while attempting to answer questions related to the positive or-negative role of the church. Yes, the church is helping to solve many social problems. But just listen to what Metropolitan Filaret said at the Local Council during the jubilee: 'Orthodoxy does not deny the huge importance of service to society in the quest for Christian unity. . . The social implications of Christianity are very important. . . However, Christianity is not just a social religion. . . Its basis is not social and moral questions, but it is founded on mystical and spiritual principles.' Can we really ignore one of the most fundamental contradictions of Orthodoxy?

And how are we to interpret Garadzha's statement that in the ideological struggle between religion and atheism neither side should claim to have a monopoly of the truth? The truth to which I adhere is my instrument in the ideological struggle and I will willingly stand it against the truth adhered to by my opponent, not in order to concede, but to see my truth emerge triumphant. Or take another example: I am a communist and I see a young man (perhaps not that young either) being drawn towards religion (whether it be Orthodoxy, a sect, or some other religion). What is my duty in such a situation? Let him get involved and save his soul? — after all it does not threaten *perestroika*. But then how do you interpret Lenin's formula about two opposing ideologies? These are the sort of questions which arise on reading Garadzha's article.

Regardless of the most lofty bene-

fits religion and the church may bring to society, the most important issue for those of us who are Marxist-Leninists is what a man is actually doing for the sake of peace and *perestroika*. Is he praying for them in obedience to what the priest says or is he working along with the majority of people, displaying initiative in the struggle to attain socialist ideals?

B. A. Nikitin,  
lecturer at the regional *Znaniye*  
society, Vladivostok

In my opinion we have now established a right approach towards religion. The foremost atheist in our country states that the church and society have common aims! I do not know how to interpret these words: 'atheists are losing out if they refuse the help and support of the clergy of various confessions in moral education.' Can the church really help in the resolution of the moral and social problems which have become so urgent in recent years? In my opinion it is not religious placebos which are necessary for the renewal of society, but a radical and long-ranging cure of the whole system. Garadzha's article can serve only to reinforce the mistaken views of many citizens that it is because of the decline of religious belief in society in general that there is a moral decline, and that without religious belief there can be no moral values. In that case why is there such a high crime rate and a high level of drug addiction and suicide in a country as deeply religious as the USA?

I can agree with the comparison of atheist education to a boat, but with one correction: that boat is not caught in a force nine gale but in a dead calm.

A. G. Baida,  
factory construction worker,  
Nezhin, Chernigov region

I read Garadzha's article with great interest and am entirely in agreement with the author: in this day and age we must change our attitudes towards religion. The fact that we are now witnessing the return to the church of people who earlier were too afraid to do so, and their baptism at the age of 50 not knowing a single prayer, speaks volumes for the Pyrrhic victory of atheism. That is a value judgement on our forms and methods of atheist education and, above all, on our ideological work. But are we not in danger of going to the opposite extreme, are we seeking to abandon the reasonable world outlook we once held? Of course we need to display more tact, more scholarship, more flexibility in our views. But if religion is not such a bad thing, as Garadzha's article seems to imply, then why have an atheist magazine, why bother with an Institute of Scientific Atheism? To a lesser extent the author's declaration that believers and atheists have common aims also strikes me as odd. What aims is he talking about? Ultimate aims? Then does that mean that a communist society and 'the kingdom of God on earth' are one and the same thing?

A. A. Apolimov,  
pensioner, Alma Ata

In Garadzha's article there is nothing but criticism for atheists both in the past and the present. Maybe it is true that religion and atheism will coexist under socialism (if I understand him correctly), but you know only too well what deep contradictions exist in our society. For some reason the author would scarcely have permitted himself to write such an article in Brezhnev's time and you would not have published it either. Now we young ones are waiting for the time when communism will come and

religion will die out. Until then, perhaps you would like to turn your magazine over to priests? But I am convinced that atheism is a humane teaching and will begin to make its influence felt over the next ten to 15 years.

I. M. Ivanov,  
Sukhinichi, Kaluga region

*Nauka i religiya (Science and Religion)*, 1989 No. 6, p. 19.

### Re-evaluation: For and Against

I wish to answer the invitation to dialogue with which V. I. Garadzha, director of the Institute of Scientific Atheism, concluded his article, 'Atheist work — A Re-evaluation'.

First of all, when Garadzha talks about problems in atheist work and when he determines our tasks in developing the theory of atheism and improving atheist education, the author uses the term 'atheism' indiscriminately, without any supplementary remarks on such varied concepts as 'Marxist-Leninist atheism', 'pre-Marxist atheism', 'vulgarised atheism' and even 'anti-religion'. And just see what happens to his argument: '*Perestroika* [...] substantially affects our appraisal of atheism itself,' writes Garadzha,

What kind of atheism is it that presents itself as some kind of creed opposed to religion? Some kind of substitute for religion, an 'anti-religion'? Did not the classics of Marxism warn against this very form of atheism when they said that an atheism which exists solely on the denial of religion itself remains within the framework of religious consciousness. [...] Do we need an atheism which has taken on board the characteristics of a religious outlook?

I do not doubt that there are indeed advocates and opponents of such a form of atheism in our society. I would hope, however, that the author of this article is not addressing himself to them. He is speaking in the

name of those involved in the study of scientific atheism, as the string of titles and letters after his name implies. Then why on earth does he insist on saying, 'we', 'us', when putting forth all of his criticisms? After all, we rejected 'atheism as anti-religion' way back in the 1960s and did not adhere to it even in the years of stagnation.

In another part of his article, Garadzha asks us to 'purge atheism of its vulgar manifestations and re-establish a truly Marxist interpretation'. To whom is this addressed? We put the level of interpretation of atheism in the 1920s and '30s behind us a long time ago. Only our ill-wishers and those who do not know the true picture would define the current state of atheism in such a way. But to hear a specialist in the field put forward such views!

Of course we should not idealise the current state of the theory of scientific atheism, nor of the social sciences. But it is ludicrous to strike out all that has been achieved over the past 20 years. We are academics, not philistines!

The author of 'Re-evaluation' is incorrect when he maintains that no one has sought to explain the reasons for the continuing existence of religion under conditions of socialism, reproaching all of our scholars for this omission. Indeed, Garadzha himself, along with some of his colleagues, was not so long ago declaring that in a socialist society

there are no social reasons for the existence of religion. But there were in fact statements of a different kind. For instance, look at M. K. Teplyakov's book *Problemy ateisticheskogo vospitaniya v praktike partinoy raboty*, (*Problems of Atheist Education in Practical Party Work*), (1972). For more than ten years I have been delivering a series of special lectures on 'The Evolution of Religion in a Socialist Society' at the institute for the improvement of qualifications of teachers in the social sciences at Leningrad State University. I am careful to explain the social, gnosiological and psychological roots of religion under socialism. Just take a glance at textbooks and reference materials — all of them describe these roots of religious belief under conditions of socialism. [ . . . ]

In the article, 'the established stereotype' according to which religion 'was ranked with such social evils as alcoholism, crime, drug addiction, corruption', is mercilessly ridiculed. And rightly so! However, this very stereotype is applied later on in the article to support the author's own position:

This alienation [of believers and the church, *Tr.*] dealt an immeasurable blow to the morality and spirituality of the people. This is the root of drunkenness on a large scale, social apathy, drug addiction. This is the reason for the tendency to retreat into an 'inner emigration' and into perhaps more extreme forms of religious belief.

Is not the author bringing the same criteria to support his own argument?

When making a few of his less controversial statements, the author does nothing to prove them or back them up scientifically. For example, what does he mean by 'universal human values [ . . . ] affirmed in the teachings of many religions, assimilated over thousands of years in the

development of world civilisation'. And why is the statement that religion is the 'opium of the people' seen to be designating religion as a reactionary force? If one takes this Marxian phrase in context, it is simply stating that religion plays a placatory and compensatory role in society: 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances — religion is the opium of the people.' (K. Marx, F. Engels, *Collected Works*)

Or take another example: 'Godlessness is also a form of faith (faith as such, not religious faith, N. G.), that is, a manifestation of religious consciousness.' Why?

The article mentions 'party documents, produced in connection with the celebration of the millennium of Christianity'. As far as I am aware there were no such documents. One can hardly call the article on the subject published in the magazine, *Kommunist*, nor the press report on Gorbachev's meeting with the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church before the celebrations party documents!

Acknowledging the necessity for a scholarly critique of religion, and stating that such a critique involves an ideological confrontation, V. I. Garadzha makes an extremely odd qualification: 'It is a confrontation which should not be seen by either side as an unquestioned right to a monopoly of the truth.' I cannot comment on behalf of 'the other side' on their approach to an ideological confrontation with us — that is their affair. As far as our side is concerned, however, I can say with full conviction that an atheist who enters into a polemic ('ideological confrontation') with a believer unconvinced of the rightness of his arguments is not worth his salt!

The criticisms I have made do not mean that I reject everything that the

article has put forward. I am fully in agreement with the author that a general effort to bring the theory of atheism into the practice of atheist education on a qualitatively new level is in accordance with the demands of revolutionary *perestroika*. I am struck by Garadzha's call to do away with outmoded stereotypes and to make a definitive break from those dogmas which chain creative thought. Indeed it is high time, using the expertise gained from sociological research, that we studied the level, conditions, and roots of religious belief among various sections of the population. It is essential to make an in-depth study of modern religious ideology in all of its ramifications. A new approach is needed in the study of the role of religion in the historical process, its place in the modern world, including in socialist society. It is true that the history of freethinking and atheism has not been given due consideration here. The role of Marxist-Leninist atheism in the system of spiritual values of a socialist society has not been fully interpreted.

The article contains other ideas worthy of attention. However, these ideas and concepts should be illuminated in such a way that there can be no doubt as to their scholarly foundation. It was such doubts which inspired me to enter into dialogue with the respected author.

N. S. Gordiyenko

V. I. Garadzha has invited us to dialogue and discussion. It is of course difficult for me, an engineer who has never studied questions of scientific atheism, to enter into such a dialogue, especially with a corresponding member of the Novosti Press Agency. Nevertheless, I will allow myself to express some of my views.

Of course, atheist education, along

with other areas in our society, is in need of *perestroika*. Those methods employed in anti-religious propaganda by the magazine *Bezbozhnik* would today be completely unacceptable and indeed counter-productive.

All the same, if in pre-revolutionary times religious belief among the rural population stood at almost 100 per cent and in the urban areas approached that proportion, by the middle of the 1930s the number of believers in urban areas had already been reduced to one-third of the population, and in rural areas to two-thirds. By the middle of the 1930s only eight to ten per cent of the adult population were believers.

So it is scarcely justifiable, as Garadzha maintains, 'to admit that all of our efforts in the previous stages of development in society were all meaningless and in vain', including the work which the party conducted in the atheist education of Soviet people.

We must continue this work — indeed conduct it more vigorously, all the more so because the return to Leninist norms in the life of society and in particular in relation to the church could be understood by certain sections of the population to be a revision of our materialist outlook and a denial of the Marxist-Leninist evaluation of religion as the 'opium of the people'.

I do not understand why we should look afresh, say, at the theory of atheism. What objective circumstances move us to do this? I have heard of no new discoveries in the natural sciences which would force materialists to conclude that 'spirit exists before matter'. And unless that really is the case then scholars simply do not need to re-evaluate either recent or long held views. Moreover, they should persist in their views, remaining in the camp of the 'adherents of systematic militant materialism in confrontation with philo-

sophical reaction and prejudice', against 'the diploma-bearing lackeys of the priesthood'. (V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*)

All of our activities should be governed by the Leninist decree that 'every individual has the right to profess any religion or none — that is to be an atheist. Discrimination on the grounds of religious belief is inadmissible.' But neither should we forget the classics of Marxism which state that religion is the opium of the people, that it is a spiritual palliative.

Garadzha talks about the necessity for *perestroika* in atheist education. If the basis of this *perestroika* will be the Leninist declaration that the party cannot and should not 'tolerate ignorance and obscurantism, clothed in the guise of religious belief', but should instead 'combat religious obscurantism by purely ideological means, through the press and the spoken word', then such *perestroika* can only be welcomed.

Garadzha, however, calls us to a 'critical analysis of these aspects'. That is cause for concern. I am concerned about the future direction of the work of the Institute of Scientific Atheism, all the more so because its director is not in agreement with the fact that 'religion, regardless of the actual social and political stance of a particular church or religious organisation, is not only an alien phenomenon, but one antagonistic to the ideals, politics, way of life and morality of socialism.'

I want also to give some attention to a question which was given a lot of space in the article: the very fact of the continuing existence of religion in a socialist society. V. I. Garadzha is absolutely correct in his judgement that theoretical evaluation (or, as he writes, 'naive assumptions') of the subject, addressed more than once in Marxist literature, does not correspond to those realities observed in Soviet society. Indeed the victory of

socialism announced in 1936 did not lead to the establishment of 'a society of mass atheism'; it is true that religion continues to exist in Soviet society; true that believers were discriminated against; true that religion was seen as the main hindrance in the development of a socialist society. . .

But is it really appropriate to ask these questions and indeed to attempt a response, basing it on the practical experience of life in Soviet society? Indeed not. We cannot really offer any more than those 'naive assumptions' because the circumstances of life did not provide the conditions for an experiment in 'religion and socialist society' for the simple reason that to our great loss such a society was not built in the Soviet state. The reason for this, it is well known, is the deviation from Leninist ideas, from the humanitarian essence of socialism. How can we talk about the existence of socialism in our society if tens of millions of its members were repressed, perished in labour camps or were shot?

Our hope is that *perestroika* will create a truly socialist society. Then we (or probably our descendants) will be able to conduct the experiment of religion in a socialist society.

In order not to stand still, in order to bring the boat out of the force nine gale tossing it about in the waves, in order to loose our chains and embark on a correct path of decisive restructuring of atheist activity we need a compass to guide us. That compass should be the philosophical heritage of Marxism-Leninism and, in the first instance, Lenin's *O znachenii voinstvuyushchego materializma* (*On the Meaning of Militant Materialism*). This work is rightly called Lenin's philosophical testament.

V. M. Kobrin

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