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Cultural Revolution

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SOCIAL MODERNIZATION

Modernization is one of the *key* themes of the Stalin years. In Isaac Deutscher's ringing phrase Stalin found Russia using the wooden plough and left it using the atomic reactor (*Russia after Stalin*, p. 55). Out of the maelstrom of the Stalin years there emerged, among many other things, the world's first welfare state. Thus it is fitting that we should look at a crucial example of modernization – the approach to motherhood.

In Elizabeth Waters' article there are three collective actors. These are the mothers, the doctors and the state authorities, all in ever-changing relationships with each other. The mothers were suspended between traditional beliefs and practices embodied in rural and folk midwives (wise women) and the new scientific, hospitalized childbirth preached by doctors. The doctors themselves were torn, partly over differing ideas of good practice, as is the case with medical people everywhere, but mainly over their role in the new society. Traditionally, doctors, especially those who served poor rural communities, were driven by a certain populist streak; that is, they tended to follow the nineteenth-century intelligentsia code of serving the people as a matter of conscience and moral duty. In the new scheme of things they were being bound more and more closely to the authorities and their much-prized professional independence was being undermined. The third party, the state, also had its own difficulties. The relatively tranquil years of relaxation between the end of the civil war in late 1920 and the upheavals embarked upon by Stalin from 1928 onwards had not been long enough for a stable, competent and organized state apparatus to form. Instead, there was a ramshackle mixture of old civil servants, new radical firebrands, conservative academics and a handful of brilliant researchers all trying to influence social policy in areas where no state or party had gone before. As in all areas of activity the authorities were driven by a confusing combination of primary impulses. On the one hand, there was the attempt to implement the principles of socialism. A major problem here was that practical socialism had to be invented as the authorities went along, there being no blueprint. Second, there were pragmatic impulses just to keep things going. Finally, there were the already formative influences of productionism with its attendant evils of careerism and bureaucratism.

Put briefly, productionism was a response to the peculiarities of the Russian revolution which had produced a Marxist, proletarian government in an economically underdeveloped peasant country. Even though one might argue about the level of Russia's development before 1914, it was beyond question that,

by 1921, it had lost a vast chunk of its industry, its skilled personnel and its international connections after six years of international and revolutionary war. Industrial production collapsed to around ten per cent of prewar output and the number of factory workers had fallen dramatically. In other words, Russia was the site of a proletarian revolution without a proletariat. Whether they fully believed it or not, Lenin, and still more Trotsky, had explained to their followers that, being a backward country, Russia could not build or sustain socialism on its own. There would have to be socialist revolutions in Western Europe to help the fragile Russian revolution. In their speeches in October 1917 both Lenin and Trotsky had said that the aim of the Russian revolution was to spark off revolutions elsewhere. Without them it would not survive. Of course, we now know that those supporting revolutions were destined never to take place. It became increasingly obvious that the Russian revolution would remain isolated. As early as 1918 Lenin, though never abandoning the hope of international revolution, began to develop a siege mentality of defending the Russian revolution at all costs and instigating an early version of 'socialism in one country'.

It is not our concern to follow this in detail but rather to examine its consequences for our period. In the forefront was the emergence of productionism. If Russia was backward then Marxist socialism, which needed advanced industries to exist before it could be built, was not possible. As a first step to constructing socialism backwardness had to be overcome and an advanced industry had to be developed. Therefore, the first task of the revolution was to industrialize and overtake capitalism. The methods involved in this, to which we will return later, might be as much pragmatic as socialist but it meant all efforts were to be focused on maximizing economic production. Not only industry and agriculture but education and medical and social services were to be centred around this overarching goal. In order to achieve the goal, and to keep the minds of people focused on the distant mountain tops of socialism and communism, the party had become increasingly authoritarian and had assumed what was later to be called 'the leading role in society'. Party groups increasingly dominated every aspect of life in the factory, the army, the sports club, the school, the housing block and, least effectively, the village. This leadership function meant the party was stretched in all directions. It needed, in Maoist terminology, people who were both 'red' and 'expert' – committed communists and technically competent. There were very few such people. As a result, party jobs were often taken up by half-hearted 'communists' more interested in the fruits of office than in building a new world. These people became known as careerists and, given its centralized, authoritarian nature arising from its ubiquitous leading role, the apparatus in which they worked became 'bureaucratized', that is driven from above by the leaders not from below by the people. Lenin and Trotsky's efforts to deal with these deeply structural deformations of the

Russian revolution were all totally inadequate. Under Stalin, they developed to an unprecedented degree.

Elizabeth Waters' article brings out these themes. In the twenties the authorities temporarily set aside the far-reaching goals of specifically communist transformation and, instead, settled for a form of modernization they could share with the doctors, notably developing health along with other forms of education in order to spread scientific ideas in place of folk traditions and herbal remedies. The stepping up of pace under Stalin brought crude productionism to the fore. This meant, for example, providing childcare less to relieve mothers of its burdens but rather to release them into the burgeoning industrial workforce. Notions of gender also changed and the party, even more than the medical profession, waged war on traditional stereotypes of women's behaviour and occupations. These last were demonstrated in the posters Dr Waters used as key sources in her research.

Elizabeth Waters: 'The Modernization of Russian Motherhood, 1917-37'

In a famous speech delivered during the First Five-Year Plan in 1931, Stalin exhorted his people to greater efforts in the construction of socialism.

To slacken the pace would mean to lag behind; and those who lag behind are beaten ... Russia ... was ceaselessly beaten for her backwardness ... For military backwardness, for cultural backwardness, for political backwardness, for industrial backwardness, for agricultural backwardness.¹

The phraseology had a novel bluntness, but the underlying message – that the country must modernize if it were to maintain its status in the Western community of nations – went back to Peter the Great. In Stalin's Russia, catching up and overtaking the West meant above all achieving higher levels of production, but it was also recognized that before the workers and peasants could transform the economy they themselves must be transformed: the new Soviet Man must be neat and efficient, literate and cultured, hygienic and healthy. The health of the next generation, of infants and young children, had from early in the nineteenth century been a matter for national concern, and campaigns for modern mothering dated from that era. Enlightenment propaganda aimed to inculcate the ideas of modern medicine on pregnancy, childbirth and infant care current across the industrializing world from Paris to New York and Sydney. In post-revolutionary Russia, this transmission of knowledge was effected through clinics, public lectures and the mass publication of popular literature, the same methods of propaganda employed elsewhere. Also, as elsewhere in the Western world, both before and since, the campaign for modern mothering was coordinated by the medical profession, which presented itself as the guardian and practitioner of the new knowledge and instructed mothers to turn to doctors rather than to wise women for advice and aid.

As well as these similarities, this modernization of Russian motherhood exhibited a number of special characteristics. It was rather late in starting, and slow to get off the ground. At the end of the nineteenth century, child care manuals were circulating in the cities, and urban clinics had opened their doors, but not until the 1920s and 1930s did the new medical knowledge begin to make an impression on the villages, and even then changes were sporadic and uneven. Because of the sharp gulf, historically, between society and the people in Russia, and the small size of the middle class, this shift from traditional to modern was resisted with unusual vigour. It took place at a time of revolutionary upheavals, at a time when ideas of freeing women from the 'cross' of motherhood were proclaimed, a circumstance which might have been expected to place the doctors, who were not radical socialists by any means, in opposition to the regime, and to some extent it did. However, the tradition of public service to which the obstetricians and gynaecologists subscribed predisposed them to take in their stride the notion of state-organized and communally oriented care. Moreover, the more radical ideas of social restructuring – the withering away of the family and the household – were shelved in the early 1920s as the New Economic Policy was introduced and the discipline of the market accepted. This moderation of Bolshevik aims made possible an alliance between the medical profession and the party based on their shared belief in the need for modernization, an alliance further cemented by the party's willingness, once the principle of state control had been asserted, to allow doctors a certain amount of autonomy. Like other alliances made in the 1920s, though, this one did not survive the First Five-Year Plan. When the country, with Stalin at the helm, plunged towards industrialization, all professional groups, including the doctors, lost status and social influence. While the messages on mothering remained constant in content, their context was transformed: it was politicized, and harnessed in the cause of economic targets. The regime in the 1930s expected women to reproduce and produce for its convenience, with only the barest of welfare provisions.

Ironically, it was in these years of extreme hardship for mothers that their image was adopted by the political iconographers. In a society living under extraordinary pressure, in constant flux, the sense of continuity offered by the maternal image, its suggestion of intimacy and solace, had therapeutic possibilities. With the disappearance, one after the other, of those institutions mediating between the family and the government – political factions, voluntary organizations, (relatively) independent unions and press, and the *zhenotdel* (women's department) – the iconic conflation of mother and motherland, family and state served to humanize and legitimize the party.

Enlightenment propaganda: content and form

Mothercraft was coordinated in the post-revolutionary period by a sub-department for the Protection of Motherhood and Infancy (usually known by its abbreviations, Okhmatmlad or OMM) under the Commissariat of Health. By 1925 it was operating

over 200 clinics in the Russian Republic (RSFSR) for pregnant women and around 400 for mothers with young babies. Women were advised to make regular visits from the time they discovered their pregnancy until the child was two years old, when it became the responsibility of the regular health clinics. Okhmatmlad had its own publishing house and between 1926 and 1927 brought out more than 170 titles, in a total of over 1.5 million copies. The written word could not be relied upon solely in a country with a high female illiteracy rate, and was complemented by radio programmes, slide shows and public talks, and most importantly by the posters that decorated the clinics and the *zhenskoi del*, and the women's corners and displays in clubs and libraries, and that were the subject of frequent special exhibitions. These posters covered all aspects of modern mothering in a manner designed to be striking, comprehensible and persuasive.³

'Look After the Mother', a poster produced in the 1920s for a peasant audience, comprised two scenes of pregnant women doing heavy work – carrying wood and a pail, and bringing in the harvest – and one of a mother engaged in feeding livestock, a task considered appropriate to her condition. The husband is told he must free his wife from unsuitable work, such as lifting weights. The master of the house', the text notes wryly, 'looks after his mare and his cow, but not his pregnant wife.'

If the medical profession had something to say on the responsibilities of family members to the mother, it focused mainly on the numerous and weighty responsibilities of the mother to the child. These included providing the right environment – a room that was clean, full of light and well ventilated. 'Sun is the baby's best friend', advised one poster. 'Cleanliness is the guarantee of health', taught a second. Breast feeding was another of the mother's responsibilities. 'Nature has its iron laws', wrote one doctor, 'and punishes for the slightest failure to observe them. Breast feeding of the baby by the biological mother is one of these iron laws of nature which cannot be broken without serious consequences.' The consequences were graphically spelled out in a poster entitled 'Mothers, Breast Feed Your Babies', which featured a bottle-feeding mother, inset against a cemetery, and a breast-feeding mother beneath a scene of healthy little children playing games.

Just as infants could be endangered by their mothers' ignorance of the rules of feeding, they could be put at risk if sleeping arrangements were incorrect. 'How to look after your baby' included, as one of its five panels, a picture of a hanging cradle and a text below, enumerating its dangers, 'The cradle is very harmful. The cradle stupefies the baby. Do not rock [the baby] either in a cradle or in your arms'. Another panel warned the mother against taking the infant to bed with her because of the risk of accidentally smothering it, or of passing on infection. In the final panel a baby sleeps peacefully in a neat and clean crib, illustrating the moral of this story, reiterated by the text: 'Buy a linen basket and your baby will have a cheap and healthy bed!'

'How to look after your baby' also included instructions on swaddling, a practice still customary in Russian towns, as well as in the countryside. Strips of cloth were

wrapped around the baby, restricting its movement, and thus keeping it out of mischief, and saving the mother from having to tend it constantly or worry for its safety. While swaddling was not linked by the doctors to high rates of infant mortality, it was thought to prevent normal physical development and hence occupied a prominent place in the list of 'don'ts'. 'Do not swaddle the baby and do not dress it in a bonnet indoors', the poster commanded. 'Do not wrap it up tightly either in winter or summer. The swaddling bands prevent the child from breathing and growing and encourage various rashes. Dress the child so that it can move its arms and legs freely.' The text is not essential for comprehension. The chubby-faced infant clad only in a short vest, content and comfortable in its cot, was designed to warm a mother's heart, just as the drawn and distressed face of the swaddled mite was guaranteed to prick her conscience. This same contrast between pleasure and misery, between the baby who cries and the baby who smiles, is employed by the artist A. Komarov in another poster, this time exclusively devoted to the theme, 'Do not swaddle infants and do not dress them in a bonnet'.

In their attempts to gain and hold attention, the posters used a variety of techniques. Babies were shown in a number of life-threatening situations: Komarov, for example, drew a baby, alone in a rough-hewn sailing boat, buffeted between rocks that were labelled with incorrect mothering practices: 'stuffy, stale air', 'dark room', 'poor care', 'dirty environment' and 'cow's milk'. They were shown making demands on their mothers in a series of posters of babes and toddlers holding banners and demonstrating for correct care; in one case, animated and militant, they are attending a meeting to listen to a nightgowned peer making a speech, and waving placards that proclaim, among other things, 'midwives, not wise women', 'mother's breast', 'protection from flies', and 'dry, clean, nappies'.

Texts were didactic and authoritarian in style, a characteristic of all enlightenment propaganda produced in this period (and indeed of the literature on mothering produced in other Western countries also). The tone adopted by G. N. Speransky in his popular *Azбука матери* (*ABC of Motherhood*) which went through several editions in the 1920s, was typical. 'If they tell you that without swaddling-bands the legs will be crooked, don't believe it', he wrote; 'it's absolute rubbish'. His comments on such matters as breast feeding and diet were equally short and sharp. It was not that the medical profession lacked arguments, rather it appears to have felt that Soviet mothers should be prepared to take on trust whatever advice it saw fit to offer.

The medical profession had emerged in nineteenth-century Russia, recruiting from the small, educated elite, and its members were often critics of tsarism, anxious to do something to change their society. It was not uncommon for men and women who had been active in radical movements to choose a career in medicine and a job in the countryside, with the aim of improving the lot of the peasants. For all their good intentions, perhaps precisely because of them, the doctors never doubted that they had a right to teach, to enlighten, to remake the lives of 'the people'. Mothering, the enlightenment propaganda emphasized, was not a matter of

intuition, or something the woman would pick up as she went along; it was a craft that had to be learned, and learned from those who knew best. As experts on the subject of modern medical knowledge, the doctors felt that it was their task to teach and command, and the duty of women to listen and obey. Because their own lives and experiences were so removed from those of their patients, they tended to dismiss with contempt traditional methods of mothering. This high-handed approach was no doubt also fuelled by a sense of isolation. In the 1920s only 5 per cent of births were attended by trained medical personnel, such was the shortage of doctors. And whereas in other Western countries urbanization, print culture and education had created fairly favourable conditions for the wide reception of modern mothering among all sections of the population, and middle-class women especially were willing converts to its cause, Russia was still rural and unschooled, and the pool of educated women from whom help could be expected was tiny.

Moreover, the system of traditional care was still well entrenched. Every Russian village had its *babka*, a woman wise in magic spells and herbal medicine (*znakbarstvo*), who attended at childbirth and gave advice to young mothers. The medical profession remained combative in the face of this formidable resistance to its messages. One doctor called for a 'struggle against *znakbarstvo*, which still holds our Russian woman firmly in its tenacious paws'; another wrote of the necessity of 'completely destroying the remnants of darkness and superstition'. In the 1920s and 1930s, as the regime was consolidated and the villages were gradually caught in the orbit of state institutions, the opportunities for organizing such a struggle improved. All methods of propaganda were pressed into service. Short stories cast the *babka* as villain, plays examined the fatal influence she could have on the young and unsuspecting, and posters illustrated the positive benefits that accrued from avoiding her. One poster contrasts a rude peasant hut with a bright and shining hospital, and the wise woman's ignorance – she is old, gnarled and clutching a newborn baby in a dirty rag – with the doctor's expertise. 'Give birth in a hospital, the wise woman ruins your health', reads the text. The damage the wise woman can do to health is the focal point of another poster: leaning on a sick, a peasant woman hobbles painfully about her business, clearly a victim of the wise woman, who lurks in the background, old, unclean and menacing. Modern medicine is represented by a young woman clad from head to foot in white, who points to a notice which reads 'hospital' and to a row of neat and spotless beds. The written text confirms the message of the visual images: 'With the wise woman's help you will soon give up the ghost. Without the midwife you will suffer pain'.

Doctors and the party: the making and the breaking of an alliance

If this bid to transform the social relations of motherhood – the replacement of traditional healers by professional experts – was typical for countries travelling the path of modernity, it occurred for the first time against the background of a political revolution that identified itself as socialist, a coincidence that was not without

impact on the manner in which the messages about mothering were conveyed. Bolshevik enlightenment propaganda in the immediate post-revolutionary years made reference to the emancipation of women and the triumph of the October revolution over exploitation and oppression. A poster produced in Saratov in 1920 linked the provision of child-care facilities with the creation of a socialist society. In its top left-hand corner, a bloated, top-hatted capitalist greedily clasps to his bosom the chains of women's unfortunate destiny, while his victims huddle below, in the shadow of a reformatory, a brothel and various nightspots, which signify the system of social and sexual oppression under which they live. On the right-hand side of the poster we are shown the socialist future, a world of crèches and nurseries, in which women, unfettered and joyful, gather under a banner proclaiming, 'All hail the 3rd Communist International'.

The first head of the administrative board of Okhmatmlad, Alexandra Kollontai, was well known for her radical views on women and the family. She was confident that the revolution would usher in equality and freedom for women, and would provide the most favourable conditions for the 'combination of work and motherhood'. While capitalism forced women to work right up until childbirth in conditions of poverty and neglect, and to experience motherhood as a 'cross', socialism, she promised, would do everything in its power to assist women with their mothering, and would accord them the high status that was their due. Motherhood, Kollontai emphasized, was a social rather than a private matter, and child care ought to be communal rather than domestic. During the period of 'war communism' such views had considerable currency. A resolution passed in 1918 at the First Congress of Worker and Peasant Women advocated a system of social education for children from birth to 16 years of age. The following year, at the First Congress on the Protection of Childhood, one delegate argued that the state alone was able to create the necessary educational environment for the development of the communist personality, an opinion echoed by V. Golubeva, a *zhenotdel* organizer, in her paper at the first Okhmatmlad conference in 1920. Nadezhda Krupskaya remembered how during the civil war she and her colleagues in the Commissariat of Enlightenment believed social upbringing to be both 'essential' and 'feasible'. Another educationalist, Anna Kalinina, described how her department 'sought out' children for communal institutions and 'carried out propaganda among the parents'.

There were some who worried that parents were usually assumed to be female: 'We organise talks at clinics and schools for women only, instead of for parents', wrote an Okhmatmlad organizer, 'invite only wives and not husbands or parents to the abortion commissions, organize childcare circles for "future mothers" and "for girls", and do not encourage boys to be involved in these activities'. The young communist paper, *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, criticized the idea that wives must take all the responsibility for looking after their babies, and their husbands none at all. *Rabotnitsa* on one occasion appealed to men to take a greater part in child care, and on another published a short fictional piece about a man who stayed home to look after his baby, supported

by alimony from his ex-wife. Early *zhenotdel* leaders, in particular Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai, were careful to use ungendered words when referring to the child minders of the future, or to include men as well as women in their number. This challenge to sexual stereotyping, though, was weak and hesitant, and found no broad support among party activists, let alone enthusiasm among the masses.

Nor were efforts to substitute public for private child care successful. To be sure, communal alternatives to family upbringing grew in number at a rate initially undreamed of by even their most enthusiastic supporters. The number of children in homes rose from just under 30,000 in 1917 to 400,000 in 1920, and to over half a million in 1922. However homes were crowded with children who had been deserted and orphaned by war and revolution and their aftermath, who came out of necessity; they fell far short of the ideals of cleanliness, comfort and communist socialization. The lofty purpose of childcare institutions – the education of citizens for a new world – was not quite forgotten, but the mundane issues of everyday crisis management held centre stage: instructions during the civil war noted the importance for the emancipation of women of the ‘combination of motherhood and work’, but then turned to the question of fixing water mains and to the need for the ‘closest attention’ to ‘the struggle against flies’.

In the economic and social environment of NEP – the streamlined industry, the high female unemployment, the reduction of welfare budgets – talk of emancipating women through the transformation of the family and the socialization of child care was seen as increasingly inappropriate. There was neither the political will nor the funding for the construction of a comprehensive network of communally run services to replace the private household. The family was recognized to be, for the time being, the safest and best environment for the child, and with the relegalization of fostering and adoption in the mid-1920s the children’s home became the last resort, even for the orphan. The crèche and the nursery, too, were luxuries beyond the party purse. Manuals on mothering in the 1920s rarely mentioned the public alternatives to family care. Even the journal *Okbrana materinstva i mladenchestva* (*Protection of Motherhood and Infancy*), designed primarily for Okhmatmlad organizers, was devoting almost half of its pages to the purely medical aspects of motherhood and infancy by 1927.

The Bolshevik rejection of the more radical aims of ‘social upbringing’ further disposed the medical profession to make peace with the regime. Especially as the doctors were themselves inclined, by and large, to favour a certain measure of public care. They believed most women to be ignorant and in need of tutelage, and had few qualms about intervention in the families of ‘the people’; they viewed the crèche and the nursery as excellent channels for the dissemination of modern ideas on mothering. While the doctors may have thought it right that their own wives should stay at home, they took it for granted that most women would work outside the family. Domesticity was not as universal an ideal as it was elsewhere in the West.

A second bone of contention between the doctors and the Bolsheviks had been the question of power. In the first months after the October revolution the party’s position was insecure, and it took what measures it could to pre-empt oppositional challenges. As early as December 1917 one of the pre-revolutionary mothercraft organizations, the Council of Children’s Shelters, was abolished, and the All Russian Guardianship (*Vserossiiskoe Popochitel'stvo*), a charitable body set up by tsarist directive in 1913 to supervise child welfare, was ordered to hand over its property and equipment to the recently formed Okhmatmlad. These moves to deprive the medical profession of its organizational role aroused deep resentment.

Over this issue, too, an acceptable compromise was soon reached. The Bolsheviks had no option but to rely on the expertise of the ‘bourgeois specialists’ (there was no other kind available), and were willing to recognize, in return for cooperation, a certain amount of professional autonomy. Doctors were invited to sit on committees and draft proposals; their learned societies, disrupted by the uncertainties of the civil war, resumed activity. Business for the medical profession proceeded much as usual. An issue of *Zhurnal akusherstva i zhen'skikh boleznei* (*Journal of Childbirth and Gynaecology*) in 1927 dedicated to A. V. Markovsky was accompanied by a photograph of the professor, smart in jacket, tie and pin-striped trousers, very much the gentleman-physician. The journal *Okbrana materinstva i mladenchestva*, honouring the 25 years of service to the profession of another eminent specialist with a biographical essay, saw no need to mention the October revolution or the Soviet regime, so little apparently did the political upheavals impinge on medical careers.

However, a few years later the alliance between the party and the doctors came to an end. In 1931 the January issue of *Okbrana materinstva i mladenchestva* appeared under a new editor and with a fresh orientation. The previous leadership was criticized for its ‘isolationism’ (*otornannost'*) and ‘its distance from the basic tasks of socialist construction’ and its ‘rather apolitical approach’. From now on, it was stated, the journal would take a greater interest in the political issues of the day, and reject the (alleged) narrow-mindedness, sentimentality and elitism of the old editorial board. As evidence of this determination to change direction, the format of the journal was altered, social and political articles, of which there were far more than before, were placed first, while medical matters were dealt with briefly, and at the back. In these years of cultural revolution the whole range of enlightenment propaganda came under scrutiny. Posters were examined closely for ideological errors, certain mothering manuals were denounced as ‘bourgeois’ and their withdrawal from circulation advised. The methods and relationships of mothering remained unchanged; it was their political context that underwent restructuring. The state was intent on establishing its control, and did so without too much difficulty, through a mixture of bullying, intimidation and intervention. The professional organizations of gynaecologists and obstetricians, as well as their editorial boards, came under attack, and one of the most serious blows to the profession’s power and prestige, paradoxically, was the vast expansion and dilution of its ranks by an ill-educated, and largely female, student body.

There was, during the period of the First Five-Year Plan, a resurgence of interest in the crèche and the nursery. The promise of rapid industrial development and communist construction encouraged the re-emergence of the Utopian ideas of the post-revolutionary years, including predictions about the withering away of the family and the household. This time round, though, the interests of the economy were given a priority they had not had before, as the posters of the time clearly demonstrated. One, issued in 1930, proclaimed the message: 'By strengthening the protection of motherhood and childhood, we help the working woman to be an active constructor of socialism', and illustrated it with a large red woman in factory clothes, a kerchief round her head and a hammer in her hand, against a distant background of crèche buildings. This lack of proportion – large working women, small communal facilities – is a feature of a number of posters of the period; so too is the productionist bent of their slogans:

By organising crèches, children's playgrounds, factory kitchens, canteens and mechanised laundries we will provide 1,600,000 new working women for the completion of the Five-Year plan.

The broad development of the network of crèches, nurseries, canteens and laundries guarantees the participation of women in socialist construction.

These posters did not hide the fact that the crèche was the means to an end; the provision of childcare would increase the number of women working in the economy and their productivity in factory and field. Also, childcare provision would make it possible for women to have more children, a crucial consideration for a government that kept a worried eye on the birth rate. 'Children are our future', claimed a poster produced shortly after abortion was banned in 1936; it depicted a woman sitting at home with a baby on her lap and a child at her side and advised its audience 'not to deprive themselves of the joys of motherhood'. Women were to be both workers and reproducers, whatever the cost – and the cost to maternal and infant health, to the psychological and social well-being of the mother and child, in the 1930s was very high indeed.⁴

Motherhood and nation

Soviet political iconographers, in their attempts to provide a population ravaged by rapid industrialization, forced collectivization and famine and the purges with a sense of self, with the cement of identity and unity, began to employ images of motherhood. Historically, maternity had a firm place in the Russian visual lexicon. Icons of the Mother and Child were, in the pre-revolutionary period, regularly carried with armies, taken on demonstrations and used to decorate the home and the work place, as well as the church. In the posters on mothering produced after October 1917 there were some echoes, suitably secularized, of the composition and style of the Orthodox *Bogomater'* and the Catholic Madonna: women held their babies close to

their bodies or sat them on their laps; often mother and child were positioned against a blank or ornamental background, or isolated by distance from society.⁵ These posters, though, had limited circulation and were mostly confined to female spaces, to the walls of maternity clinics, *zhenotdel* offices and 'women's pages'. In public and political iconography women and children were conspicuous by their absence. Despite its professed commitment to women's emancipation, the Bolshevik regime saw change in terms of factory and production, reference points that were primarily masculine; the hero was the male industrial worker and it was his image that stood for revolution and socialism.

At the time of the First Five-Year Plan this male hegemony was challenged. The state, in need of an increasing supply of workers, elevated maternity to an issue of national resonance. Posters on Okhmatmlad were displayed in public places; mothers and children featured for the first time on postage stamps; women participated in gymnastic parades, wearing narrow, mid-calf skirts, and holding aloft bouquet-bearing children. In search of unifying symbols the state twinned motherhood and nation. A political poster produced in the mid-1930s shows a mother and girl-child cowering helplessly before the Nazi menace; the two figures, painted in a realistic style, draw attention to the dangers which individual women and children face, but they clearly also represent the nation that has to be defended against fascism. During the Great Patriotic War this conflation of family and state and their representation by motherhood became commonplace. The middle-aged woman holding up in urgent entreaty a copy of the 'military oath' in Iraklii Toidze's famous war poster '*Rodina-mat' zovet* (*The Motherland-Mother calls*) is both real mother and motherland. '*Za rodinu-mat'* (*For the Motherland*) another of the most ubiquitous posters of the period, depicts five soldiers in battle-like poses beneath the towering figure of a woman, draped in red, with a banner raised in her right hand, her free arm round a small (male) child; she combines the qualities of both the martial female heroines of Russian folklore and the maternal stereotype. She is *Matushka-Rossiya* (*Mother Russia*) personified. Viktor Koretsky's '*Voin krasnoi armii, spasi!*' (*Soldiers of the Red Army, save us!*) – a mother and (male) child threatened by an enemy bayonet – evokes, in its realism, the loved ones left behind and, in its composition, the Mother of God, symbol of faith and nation. Gigantic reproductions of this poster were pasted up in Soviet streets, as if it were an icon affirming the holy nature of the struggle against Germany.

The shift of Soviet ideology towards traditional themes, particularly Russian nationalism, is often dated to 1941, and certainly the frequent depiction of motherhood in poster art during the war attests to their growing importance; but the appropriation by public iconography of mother and child began earlier, as the Stalinist regime sought to bolster its legitimacy through a semblance of patriarchal stability.

The modernization of motherhood

Over the past 20 years a substantial sociological and historical literature on the impact modern medicine on motherhood and infant welfare has been published.⁸ While earlier work in the field chronicled the development of the medical profession and listed its achievements, the more recent literature has examined critically the benefits and drawbacks of modern mothering and its wider significance for society and culture. The transformation of motherhood from a social into a medical event has been described, following the emergence, beginning from the eighteenth century, of the medical profession and its successful claim to supervise birth and infant care. In many cases, control passed as a result of this process from women to men – from female healers, friends, relatives, neighbours and from mothers themselves, to male doctors; everywhere decision making passed from individuals and their communities to the experts. Modernization thus comprised not only new knowledge about the birth process and a set of instructions on mothering but also, and more importantly, a range of new social relationships.

In Russia, by the end of the nineteenth century, gynaecologists and obstetricians were already well organized in the cities. Lectures were held and manuals published to preach the virtues of modern mothering; in major urban areas the medicalization of childbirth was far advanced, with over 60 per cent of births in St Petersburg and Moscow taking place in maternity shelters and wards by 1914. The Bolsheviks, when they came to power, criticized the tsarist regime for the timidity and inadequacies of its reforms, and condemned the philanthropy and class inequalities of the past, but they did not make fundamental changes to the programme of modernization embarked upon by the pre-revolutionary doctors. The Soviet government was happy to sponsor campaigns that exhorted women to bath their children with soap and water and buy them cribs to sleep in, happy to see wise women denounced. The official notion of modernization, in this instance, fitted well with the one subscribed to by the professional intelligentsia. Bolshevik socialism, even in its Utopian moments, provided few resources for prefiguring contemporary criticisms of the medicalization of motherhood and contemporary concern with the mother's loss of control over the processes of pregnancy and birth and the father's lack of participation in parenting. The Bolsheviks shared the faith of their era in technology and expertise; and at the same time, and again in tune with their times, they paid homage to nature and did not question the maternal instincts of women or seek to emancipate them from their monopoly on the nurturing role.

The Bolsheviks set out to do things bigger and better, but not differently. The modernization of motherhood after 1917 continued along pre-revolutionary lines and it conformed to patterns of development observable everywhere in the Western world. Modernization in the Russian context did have its specificities. The country was vast and rural, which put brakes on the spread of the new knowledge on mothering, both before and after 1917. The professional classes were tiny and isolated, and inclined as a consequence to accept collective, state-orchestrated solutions to the

problems of maternal and infant welfare. And finally, the weakness of civil society and of democratic political traditions in Russia propelled the state, rather later than was fashionable in most Western countries, to employ motherhood as a political icon.

NOTES

[Reorganized and renumbered from the original.]

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1. Quoted in I. Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 328.

2. Okhmatmlad had branches in all the republics of the USSR and the process of modernization was in many respects uniform across the country. However, there were cultural differences, which need to be addressed separately. The focus here is on the RSFSR and Russian motherhood.

3. For a discussion of enlightenment propaganda see *my Teaching Mothercraft in Post-Revolutionary Russia*, *Australian Journal of Slavonic and East European Studies*, 1:2 (1987), pp. 29-56. The instructional images of Soviet motherhood posters are analysed in my 'Child care Posters and the Modernization of Motherhood in Post-Revolutionary Russia', *Sbornik: Study Group on the Russian Revolution*, 13 (1987), pp. 65-93.

4. In the early 1930s infant mortality rates increased, the number of foundlings rose and the proportion of working women provided with crèche and nursery places for their children fell.

5. Two posters produced for 'Motherhood and Infancy Protection Weeks' in 1923, one in Moscow, the other in Georgia, show mothers and children against a plain background, unrelieved, or in the Georgian case broken only by stylized flowers and the branch of a tree. The emblem of Okhmatmlad featured in the foreground a mother with a baby on her lap and a toddler at her side, and far in the distance the urban skyline of the socialist future.

6. W. A. Rukeyser, *Working for the Soviet: An American Engineer in Russia* (London, 1932), p. 83.

7. For a photograph of such a parade see G. Shudakov, *Pioneers of Soviet Photography* (New York, 1983), p. 155. It was taken in Red Square by Ivan Shagin in 1937, the year after the ban on abortion was introduced, and contrasts sharply with one from 1930 by the photographer Arkadii Shaikh of determined women gymnasts in shorts and t-shirts, striding out unencumbered.

8. See Nancy Schron Dye, 'History of Childbirth in America', *Signs*, 1 (1980), pp. 97-108; Judith Walzer Leavitt, 'Under the Shadow of Maternity: American Women's Responses to Death and Debility Fears in Nineteenth Century Child birth', *Feminist Review*, 1 (1986), pp. 129-54 Barbara Ehrenrich and Deirdre English, *Far Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (London, 1979); Ann Oakley, *Women Confined: Towards a Sociology of Childbirth* (Oxford, 1980); J. Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England 1900-1939* (London, 1980); E. Shorter, *A History of Women's Bodies* (New York, 1982); Ann Oakley, *The Captured Womb: a History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women* (Oxford, 1984); Philippa Mein Smith, *Maternity in Dispute. New Zealand 1920-1939* (Wellington, 1986).

TOWARDS THE 'NEW SOVIET PERSON': THE ASSAULT ON RELIGION

Cultural themes are often passed over in analysis of the Stalin years. They should not be. Culture was central to the Soviet project. That is why this collection has opened with two articles on cultural questions. Why is culture so important? At heart, the goal of communism was not only to reform institutions but to change the human personality. In the Stalin years there was much talk about 'The New Soviet Person' who would be produced as socialism advanced. Where bourgeois society needed greedy, selfish individualists socialism would bring out the inner generosity of people and build up their need for co-operation and community spirit. From the early days of the revolution there had been disputes about exactly what the characteristics of the new person would be and, even more complex, how such people would be produced. A special organization, The Proletarian Cultural Educational Association (usually referred to as Proletkul't for short), was set up shortly before the October revolution. Its stormy early history led to the curtailment of its autonomy in 1920 after which it became little more than a part of the growing propaganda apparatus. However, the drive to create the new person lived on. One fundamental characteristic which no one in the party criticized was that science and a scientific view of the world would be at the heart of the new person's outlook. In the early stages of the revolution the 1919 Party Programme stated that the Party would help 'the toiling masses to liberate their minds from religious prejudices' by 'organizing on a wide scale scientific-educational and anti-religious propaganda'. But, the programme continued, it was 'necessary to avoid offending the religious susceptibilities of believers, which leads only to the hardening of religious fanaticism.'

During the 1920s direct confrontation with religion, and particularly the Orthodox church, had given way to more subtle tactics. A group, known as the Living Church broke away from the mainstream of Orthodoxy and professed support for the social aims of the revolution. It was not notably successful either in winning over believers or placating left-wing militants for whom Lenin's intolerant snort – 'to prefer a blue devil to a yellow one is a hundred times worse than not saying anything about it at all' – expressed their own feelings. As the twenties progressed, the atmosphere gradually developed into the rising confrontational mentality of the thirties. In the mid-twenties militant groups had tried to seize control over the field of literature. They achieved a partial victory in 1925 when a resolution called for closer party supervision of literature. However, for the moment, non-communist writers thought to be sympathetic to the revolution, the so-called 'fellow travellers', were allowed to continue to publish. Journals such as *Novyi mir* (*New World*) and *Krasnaia nov'* (*Red Virgin Soil*) continued with relatively liberal publishing policies.

However, the left-wing groups, such as the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, continued to put pressure for a narrower definition of what was acceptable. The late twenties saw a growing clamour from ultra-leftist militants to such an extent that some observers believe pressure from below was instrumental in setting off the new revolution of 1928-32 which embraced cultural, industrial and economic spheres. However, that belief has waned somewhat in recent years and even its apparent proponents seem to disclaim it. We will return to the issue of the precise reason for the adoption of the 'great turn' in 1928 later on but for the moment it is only necessary to note that an avalanche of Utopian ideas, some of which were a revival of concepts from the period of the revolutionary wars (1918-21), began to gather momentum. Extreme thinking had never been abandoned. The fanciful plan for a colossal 'House of Soviets' had begun to be implemented with the blowing up of one of Moscow's most prominent, and ugliest, cathedrals in 1931. Reality had clicked in too late when it was discovered that the geological formations of the area would not bear the weight of the proposed super-skyscraper. The big hole left by the demolition was converted into an open-air swimming pool until, in post-Soviet times, the cathedral was, controversially, rebuilt. A number of buildings, including the Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square and the scattering of workers clubs and houses in Moscow by Konstantin Mel'nikov, were constructed according to radical principles. After 1928, however, Utopian ideas had their head. Architecture remained an area in which extravagant plans for Soviet homes and Soviet cities were drawn up. The homes would have communal facilities for cooking, eating, washing and childcare to replace private ones. This meant apartments without kitchens. Attempts were made to design cities appropriate to the new values. A proposed linear city, crossing the entire country, was intended to fulfil the demand of the *Communist Manifesto* that the distinction between town and country should be abolished.

In all areas of cultural life battles between ‘fellow travellers’ and party moderates on one hand and leftist militants on the other were waged. Philosophy, history, music art, literature, education, science were turned into left/right conflicts. Increasingly, the slogan ‘There is no fortress the Bolsheviks cannot storm’ was taken literally by the militants. Bolshevik will was deemed to be all that was necessary to achieve a task. Failure in such a task was, therefore, attributed mainly to weakness of will. In a manner imitated by Maoists in 1966, ‘objective’ constraints (that is, whether something was practically possible or not) were dismissed as bourgeois illusions. Anything, it seemed, could be achieved if it was willed sufficiently strongly. This phase of ultra-leftist utopianism lasted until 1931-2 when more conventional ideas began to reassert themselves.

Not surprisingly, however, in the Utopian wave, the issue of religion came to the fore. In his article, which was later incorporated in a book on the topic, Daniel Peris shows in detail the way one major anti-religious organization, the League of Godless, operated. Relative moderates set the organization up in the first place but in 1929 their positions were attacked by extremists intent on taking it over. Peris hints that the differences included a significant generation gap with most of the militants being younger than the moderates. They also tended to focus on organizations like the Communist Youth League (*Komsomol*) referred to several times by Peris. Typically, the left militants were repulsed at the Congress itself but, in effect, took the leadership into their hands shortly after anyway. They renamed it the League of Militant Godless and jacked up the pace of its activities, ruthlessly following their goals and claiming the mantle of party authority for their aggressive intolerance. Similar organizations were set up across the intellectual spectrum which attempted to be the self-appointed guardians of party orthodoxy in literature, academic life and the sciences.

The author presents his study of the congress as an exemplar of the practices of the time, illustrating the moderate/extremist clashes, which we have already seen in action in Elizabeth Waters’ account, and many other aspects of the struggles of the period. One of these was the growing cult of Lenin, whose posthumous authority was sought by both sides who traded Lenin quotes in an attempt to outdo each other. Stalin has an ambiguous presence in Peris’s account. He is rarely referred to in the congress discussions, though he is mentioned as the leader, it being the case that the downfall of Bukharin (who did address the congress) and the party right was already evident. An invitation was extended to Stalin to address the congress and thereby pronounce on its differences. Stalin’s rejection of the invitation seems to have disappointed all the delegates. Nonetheless, a cult of Stalin was not yet evident. However, a culture of searching for ‘deviationists’, whether they were groups or hapless individuals like Galaktionov who was pilloried at the congress, was already well entrenched by this time and was to burgeon in the later years.

Daniel Peris: ‘The 1929 Congress of the Godless’

Among the many social campaigns launched in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, the effort to counter the pervasive influence of religion was among the most visible. Examining how the Bolsheviks sought to introduce atheism into Holy Russia sheds light not only on Bolshevik strategies for planned secularization, but also on the evolving Soviet political culture. Both of these subjects can be approached through analysis of the stenographic report of the June 1929 Congress of the League of the Godless (*Soyuz bezbozhnikov*), the quasi-governmental organization charged with eradicating religion. This document serves as a window through which we observe the repeated clashes of two distinct and opposed camps promoting conflicting views on how the anti-religious campaign ought to be run. More importantly, the stenographic report highlights the shared assumptions and rhetorical conventions of the coalescing political culture in which the congress occurred and which qualitatively altered the character of the anti-religious debate.

This article first reviews the 12 years of anti-religious history prior to the congress. It then examines the divisions at the congress along ideological and institutional lines. The third section discusses those elements of the emerging political culture evident in the debate; finally, the conflicts in the anti-religious camp are linked to the broader political and social transformation engulfing Soviet society on the cusp of Stalin’s revolution.

Anti-religious agitation from the revolution to 1929

The stage was set for conflict at the congress by 12 years of experience which had yielded no certain method of pursuing anti-religious agitation and had created substantial ill-will among the institutions responsible for anti-religious affairs.’ Indeed, the Soviet struggle against religion had evolved through two broad and generally contradictory stages. The initial phase, covering the first six years of Bolshevik rule, relied on legislative dismemberment of the Orthodox Church and selective repression of religious leaders. A second phase, beginning around 1923, increasingly employed propaganda and education with the goal of combating popular religious beliefs and practices. Thus, by 1929 two distinct and often conflicting models of anti-religious agitation had been employed. We shall explore each in turn.

Upon taking power, the Bolsheviks immediately disestablished Eastern Orthodoxy. They nationalized church property and transferred church-run educational institutions to the Commissariat of Enlightenment. Registration of births, marriages and deaths, acts formerly handled by the Church, were also given to civilian authorities. The constitution adopted by the Russian Soviet Republic on 10 July 1918 guaranteed freedom of religious and anti-religious propaganda, as well as the freedom to profess any religious creed. Rules eventually issued by the Commissariat of Justice allowed believers to retake possession of churches rent-free, but the frequent clarifications emanating from the Eighth

Department (the division of the Justice Commissariat charged with overseeing the legal aspects of religion) during the early years of the Soviet regime seem to indicate a failed effort at achieving a smooth and uniform separation of church and state.² While the administrative body of the Orthodox Church was effectively suppressed through a variety of laws and extraordinary measures, there was little the new regime could do immediately to change popular behaviour. Bolshevik concessions to the continuation of religious expression sought to make a virtue of necessity – in this case, the undeniable pervasiveness of religion in Russia.

Factors other than legislation also contributed to church-state relations in this early period. First, the Civil War added its own measure of confusion and contradiction to Bolshevik policy. Although most clergy were sympathetic to the Whites, the Bolsheviks had to avoid alienating the peasantry, and this required some sensitivity in their handling of popular religious expression. The ‘Church valuables’ crisis in 1922 constituted a second moment in this initial period of church – state relations. Difficulties in responding to the famine in the Volga region in late 1921 and 1922 led the Bolsheviks to demand that the Orthodox Church sacrifice its collection of treasures, including sacramental vessels, to import grain. Despite wide contribution of non-sacramental treasures by the Church, the Bolsheviks initiated a general collection campaign in 1922 resulting in popular riots, the arrest of Church leaders, including Patriarch Tikhon, and the execution or imprisonment of numerous churchmen. In general, the first six years of Bolshevik rule were hard on the church. It was a period of legal dismemberment, overt repression, and direct, often violent, intervention against the body of the Church and its leaders. Dire circumstances and an ideology bitterly opposed to religion, and so far untempered by practical experience, formed the basis of anti-religious efforts during these years.

A second broad period of Bolshevik policy commenced in 1923. While legal and physical pressures continued on the clergy and what remained of the church’s administrative body, new efforts relying on extensive propaganda and education sought to influence the everyday thinking and behaviour of believers.³ One manifestation of this shift to a more systematic anti-religious effort was the creation of the League of the Godless in 1925, which will be discussed below. Another was the appearance of an array of anti-religious propaganda serials, pamphlets and books. This new orientation offered anti-religious lectures, museums, displays, ‘evenings’, a ‘Godless’ corner at the factory or village reading hut, and conspicuous display of anti-religious slogans. It is difficult to assess what impact, if any, these actions had on believers, but they constituted a significant part of the new anti-religious package.

Why had six years passed before the Bolsheviks turned to socializing the masses in a fundamental tenet of the ruling ideology? In its initial enthusiasm, the Bolshevik leadership may have laboured under the illusion that it could legislatively efface religion from the Russian landscape. Then the Civil War intervened and

prevented systematic propaganda efforts. Even when the battlefields fell silent in late 1920, the Bolsheviks did not turn immediately to religious matters. The roll-back of the Bolsheviks presence in the countryside associated with the X Congress in March 1921 left the party in a weak position to influence everyday behaviour, particularly in the countryside where religion was strongest. The new direction in policy from 1923 onward reflected not only the lack of insurmountable obstacles to launching an anti-religious campaign, but also the growing realization that religion was not going to expire of its own accord once the administrative body of the church had been crushed. Both the XII (1923) and XIII (1924) Congresses called for systematic and careful anti-religious propaganda, but Bolshevik leaders remained concerned about alienating the population of the countryside, in which they were weakly represented. Hence, it is most reasonable to conclude that this shift in methods occurred at the first convenient opportunity, when the nation was no longer at war, when the Bolsheviks realized religion would not simply disappear, and when they could begin to give at least some attention to what they wanted to make out of the enormous country they had come to rule. In practical terms, this meant 1923 and later.

Yet another source of potential conflict at the congress stemmed from an ambiguous experience in the administration of the anti-religious effort. In the first period, the Commissariats of Enlightenment and Justice, the *agitprop* (agitation and propaganda) section of the Party Central Committee, the Central Committee’s Anti-religious Commission and the Cheka, all participated in the management of religion, yet none of the institutions initially involved took the lead during the 1920s, and one that should have, the Komsomol, shied away from the task. The resulting void in the management of anti-religious activities meant that the shift to a more propagandistic mode was not accompanied by clearer lines of authority. Despite occasional directives emanating from the Central Committee, the party did not take direct responsibility for a nationwide effort. While previous, small-scale propaganda efforts might have been arranged by the local party, Komsomol or trade union committee, or in the military, no broadly based, coordinated campaign existed.

Even the foundation of the League of the Godless in 1925 did not completely resolve the administrative difficulties facing anti-religious activists. The League had evolved out of a body formed in 1924, The Society of Friends of the Newspaper *Bezbozhnik* (*The Atheist*), which incorporated itself in April 1925 as the League of the Godless. Though the establishment of the League marked a watershed in Soviet anti-religious efforts, the organization remained weak. Its activities, under the direction of its leader and motivating force, Emil’yan Yaroslavsky,⁵ concentrated primarily on the creation of a publishing empire, including serials, monographs, brochures and methodological tracts. In addition, the *Bezbozhniki* arranged specific campaigns, agitated against observance of religious holidays and rituals, sought to introduce new holidays and rituals, trained activists and held meetings and lectures on anti-religious themes. Despite these efforts, the League before 1929 appears to have been ineffective

in its efforts to overcome religion. In 1929 membership jumped rapidly to 1 million, according to a League spokesman at the congress. This fourfold increase in the League's size from 1928 strongly suggests that the impressive strides made in membership did not necessarily indicate a sudden eradication of religion. Many delegates spoke of having only formally organized cells or councils by 1928, a refrain that could be heard from delegates such as Adel'berg from Siberia, Shchepkin from the Urals, and the delegate from Kirgizia, Abramson. The overall impact of the League's efforts is hard to assess, but we may safely conclude that by 1929 it had not achieved a comprehensive transformation of popular religious life.

The birth of the League of the Godless was not accomplished without difficulty. Battles over turf and ideology among the newly formed League, Moscow-based anti-religious activists, Ukrainian cadres and the Red Army characterized the early history of the League. These conflicts spilled into the central party press in 1925 and 1926 and were certainly not forgotten by 1929. The congress provided yet another opportunity for them to resurface.

To appreciate the developments at the 1929 congress it is crucial to understand this mixed and often contradictory legacy of 12 years of anti-religious experience. We have already noted how two different methods of anti-religious work had been employed. To this we must now add the factor of an uneasy institutional order administering the campaign. Latent divisions between the Komsomol and its supporters on the one hand and the League Central Council on the other characterized this order and would reappear at the congress.

Ideologies and institutions

When the Godless delegates gathered on 10 June 1929 in Moscow at the House of the Red Army, the central issue of the congress was the implementation of an effective anti-religious campaign. Gone were the days when one could still believe religion would disappear naturally. In this sense, everyone gathered at the congress advocated an active, aggressive stance, but there existed two distinct groups characterized by qualitative differences over how this should be achieved.

One group, centred in the League Central Council and Narkompros, emphasized the cultural and social sources of religion and argued that it was not solely a political matter to be handled by the secret police. Adherents to this position distinguished between what they acknowledged as the consciously anti-Soviet leadership of religious groups and the more uninformed, uncultured mass of toilers who should not be considered plotting counterrevolutionaries. The problem lay in a lack of proper consciousness and '*kul'turnost'* among the believing masses. Yaroslavsky declared: 'All the same, if we take our peasantry ... then we see that *bezkul'tur'e* still plays an enormous role'. These activists, whom I call 'culturalists', were quick to acknowledge the importance of what was labelled open, politically subversive activity by priests and kulaks, already *de rigueur* in Soviet discourse by mid-1929, but their arguments revealed an equal or greater emphasis on the cultural bases of religion.

Approaching religion from the culturalist perspective entailed important consequences for the forms and methods of anti-religious activity. It meant a policy of education, systematic propaganda and a concerted effort to change the behaviour and attitudes of the populace. It rejected forceful intervention to close churches or remove priests unless sufficient, genuine, popular support had been built beforehand. To do otherwise would mean, in Yaroslavsky's words, entering 'a bitter battle with at least 60-70 million toilers. Is that correct? No!'. This position was aired frequently during the congress. Lunacharsky, Commissar of Enlightenment, linked changing the consciousness of the rural masses to the establishment of socialism, which, he said, could not be achieved without extensive cultural work. Careful not to deny the relevance of administrative measures or compulsion when circumstances warranted, Lunacharsky criticized as politically unwise measures that would be perceived as violent, unwelcome attacks by a hostile regime: 'We should not undertake to make priests martyrs and have peasants turn against us'. The culturalists believed that the inculcation of communist morality would follow logically from anti-religious propaganda. As Lunacharsky declared, 'to destroy religion but not to replace it with a Marxist worldview – that is a slogan from bourgeois freethinkers', and Yaroslavsky rejected as ideologically unsound the charge that 'our task is not to replace religion, but to destroy it'.⁷

The most visible culturalist target was the Komsomol, and culturalist criticism of that organization indicates to what degree institutional or turf battles also played a role in the congress debates. Yaroslavsky complained that no one from the Central Committee of the Komsomol was in attendance at the congress; he also intimated that the popularity of some Christian youth groups reflected weak Komsomol influence and that ideological work was necessary among Komsomol members. He berated Komsomol superficiality in anti-religious work, and noted that the Komsomol representative on the League Central Council did not attend meetings. More was needed from the Komsomol, he continued, than efforts twice a year at Christmas and Easter. Yaroslavsky ended his main report by rejecting statements in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* that criticized the replacement of Easter by May Day.⁸

The opposing camp placed culture second to politics in its analysis of the causes of religion and advocated a much more aggressive, volunteerist stance. This group, the 'interventionists', was centred primarily in the Komsomol, but it also enjoyed support from the Moscow League organization and other delegations. Central to the interventionist argument was that religion, as an expression of the former class structure, posed a direct political threat to socialism. A delegate from the Komsomol clearly articulated the interventionist position when he argued that religion was the

ideology of our class enemy, and that among other measures, we must in the clearest, sharpest manner uncover the class essence of religion, prove that the church is a political

organization of the class enemy and that the church's primary weapon is deception of the masses.

This threat was manifested through domestic enemies such as priests, religious organizers sympathetic *kulaks* and former Whites, and foreign enemies through protestant sectarians in Russia who maintained contacts with organizations abroad. A leading interventionist, I. Bukhartsev, attacked the League for not focusing on the class basis of religion. League leaders, he continued, paid lip service to the political element of religion, but in their actions they failed to link the battle against religion to the battle against class enemies. To a reformed League Bukhartsev offered the carrot of mass Komsomol enrolment:

If you clearly frame the issue of anti-religious propaganda, if you sharply come out against atheistic lispings, against liberal methods of battle against religion, you will receive a fresh cohort of young workers and peasants, and the support of the Leninist Komsomol.

The activist position articulated by Bukhartsev was buttressed by the promulgation in April 1929, only two months before the congress, of a law further restricting religious expression, and one month later, in May 1929, by removal from the Soviet Constitution of the right to promote religion.

The interventionist camp placed greater emphasis than the culturalists on the dialectic of rising tension in society as the Soviet Union approached socialism. For example, a writer for *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* inveighed against Lunacharsky, now the radicals' favourite target and an embattled figure by 1929, for failing to realize the import of this new period which called for 'class-based criticism of religion on live, concrete, contemporary material'. Although all the delegates spoke in terms of the 'attack' of socialism and the 'counterattack' of religion, the radicals of Bukhartsev's stripe were eager to place all expressions of religious faith in terms of political subversion, and were equally quick to invoke military metaphors to justify an 'assault' on religion.

The interventionists were also less interested in distinguishing between the followers and leaders of religious groups and less prepared to apply different methods of anti-religious work to separate religious creeds. Even sectarian communes employing progressive agricultural methods were rejected out of hand. The interventionists also derided enlightenment and welcomed application of administrative measures. Speaking of the latter, one Moscow radical declared, 'it is impermissible to renounce and be afraid of them'. Administrative measures should be used to indicate the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. One of the Komsomol radicals argued that they were necessary to give an 'irreconcilable, Bolshevik, clear, class rebuff to *the assaulting popovshchina* (Clerical assault).

Fuelled by such impassioned debate, the conflict nearly got out of hand. At one point Bukhartsev directly indicted Yaroslavsky for overstating the cultural factor. Quoting Yaroslavsky on the 'enormous role' played by 'unculturedness', Bukhartsev

countered, 'to me it seems that this does not capture the significance of religion at our stage'. Bukhartsev's comments were met by hissing from the floor. He shot back: 'What are you cackling about; really, this is not a meeting of kulaks'. The text of the stenographic report notes that the ensuing noise in the hall cut off the speaker. Having been voted more time to complete his fusillade, Bukhartsev then criticized the League's understanding of religion in the period of socialist construction.

Clearly, conflict between two very different camps characterized the congress, but it would be incorrect to assume that each side was completely unified. In the first place, only a few delegates gave presentations coherent or long enough to separate them from the stream of say-nothing appearances that crudely mouthed Yaroslavsky's statements. The real debate occurred among a limited number of self-interested delegates who had the opportunity to set out distinct positions. Determining which of the delegates spoke authoritatively for which organization or viewpoint constitutes an important task in analysing this meeting. We can safely assume that Yaroslavsky's position represented that of the league leadership and that Lunacharsky reflected the attitudes of many highly ranked pedagogues, but beyond that, it is difficult to draw precise institutional boundaries. Most notably, many delegates from local League councils were highly critical of Narkompros and harped on the lack of anti-religious work in the schools.

Among the opposition, the Komsomol, the Moscow and the Ukrainian League organizations appeared unified in their interventionism, with the Komsomol playing the leading role. Yaroslavsky pointed out that certain towns like Nizhnii-Novgorod and regions such as the Ukraine had prevented the formation of Godless cells. He roundly criticized the Moscow party activists who refused to cooperate with the League's Central Council. M. Galaktionov, a writer for *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, indicated that his criticisms of Lukachevsky, a prominent League figure, were based in part on what he had learned at a recent Moscow Region League Council meeting. At a minimum, the Moscow and Komsomol interventionists communicated with each other. Nonetheless, their cooperation was potentially tactical, extending little beyond a shared, intense dislike for the League's central apparatus. The Muscovite stance reflected, in part, its long-standing conflict with the League; a Moscow radical, Orlov, declared that the Moscow organization differed from the Central Council over those same issues as in its earlier clash with the League in 1925 and 1926. The Ukrainian organization framed its opposition to the League Central Council as much in terms of Ukrainian autonomy as it did in terms of specific methodological disagreements. Rogal' of the Ukraine warned against excessive centralization and argued that best results would be achieved only if national peculiarities were taken into consideration. Several Ukrainian delegates, however, spoke at cross purposes in regard to League strategy and centralization, and this should alert us to the dangers of assuming institutional or regional uniformity of views. These qualifications aside, the popularly recognized bastion of interventionism lay in the offices of *Komsomol'skaya*

Pravda, whence came repeated shrill attacks which were supported by Ukrainian and Muscovite delegates.

In sum, the dominant institutional framework of the congress presented a radicalized, vibrant, impatient Komsomol, in league with smaller groups of oppositionists and radicals, arrayed against the staid and sober representatives of the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus. Ferment characterized the Soviet anti-religious activist body; the outlines of the cultural upheaval of the First Five-Year Plan period were clearly visible.

Soviet political culture and the Godless debates

While on the level of ideology and institutions – measures prominent in the existing historiography – serious divisions existed among the Godless, examination of the congress in terms of the rhetoric employed to wage the above-mentioned struggles reveals a number of shared assumptions and oratorical conventions which shed light on aspects of Soviet political culture, including one which has until recently evaded analysis, language. At least four elements of this culture can be discerned in the congress debates – the delegates’ self-justification in terms of Lenin, their calls for centralization, their method of criticizing individuals rather than institutions, and their avowed subordination to the party. All took place against the backdrop of a political discourse which served as an increasingly opaque medium of debate. While objective differences between the opposing camps existed, the debates occurred in the context of a dominant political culture that accorded as much importance to certain words, phrases and metaphors as to the ideas they articulated. The battle raged on a field, language, sought by both contenders. The terrain was pitted, however, with traps which could capture those who vied for its control.

Both the interventionists and the culturalists sought to justify their positions in the light of the already crystalized source of transcendent truth in Soviet political debate: the corpus of Lenin’s writings. By 1929 Lenin had become apotheosized as the font of Bolshevik wisdom and political culture.⁹ Thus, both sides professed obeisance to the true doctrine of Lenin and charged the other side with straying from Lenin’s understanding of religion. The breadth of Lenin’s written legacy, however, allowed almost any position to be buttressed by a significant quotation. Yaroslavsky frequently referred to Lenin, and in his closing speech to the congress, an emotionally charged rebuttal of the interventionists’ criticisms, he declared:

That’s how Lenin understood (it): organisation and enlightenment of the proletariat will lead to the dying out of religion, but we should not throw ourselves into the *avantyura* (adventure) of a political battle with religion.

Yaroslavsky then repeated a well known statement by Lenin on the importance of cultural work.¹⁰ Bukhartsev justified the interventionist position by citing Lenin’s claim that ‘it would be foolishness to think that in a society based on the endless

oppression and coarseness of the working masses, it is possible to dispel religious prejudices through purely propagandist means’.

The efforts of the opposing camps to determine anti-religious policy relied upon carving a generally accepted position on religion out of this broad and vague official dogma. The Godless operated in the environment of absolute doctrines characteristic of Russian intellectual development, yet no particular ‘ism’ explicitly directed them in the creation of an atheist society. Marx provided no practical plans; Lenin’s *State and Revolution* was of little use in this regard. Even Yaroslavsky’s pronouncements did not enjoy the status of unchallengeable doctrine. No unassailable source of wisdom in this regard existed because such a social transformation had never before been fully thought out or experienced. However, while no well trodden path existed, the political culture demanded that at each stage of social development there exist absolute procedures and methods of social management, and so the leaders of the anti-religious debates acted as if an absolute plan existed. Their task was simply to have their own answer to ‘What do we do next?’ accepted as that of Lenin and the party. While the debates reflected real policy alternatives, the existence of ‘better’ or ‘worse’ approaches receded behind the importance of having one’s own method designated as Leninist, and therefore *a priori* the only correct strategy. The debates at the congress revealed the subjectivity of this process and the tension between a constrictive rhetorical framework and widely divergent policy proposals.

Centralized organization complemented obeisance to Lenin and constituted another basic theme of the congress. In his opening report Yaroslavsky attributed the weakness of anti-religious activity in large part to organizational shortcomings. In particular, uncoordinated and ineffective agitation resulted from a lack of centralized leadership that left broad swathes of society unexposed to anti-religious agitation. Yaroslavsky argued that the level of organization determined the success of anti-religious activities, and consequently that the remedy for the League’s difficulties was centralization around the League’s Central Council. He presented administrative reform to strengthen the League’s ability to direct the anti-religious effort nationally as a panacea for the campaign’s weaknesses. Following Yaroslavsky’s lead, delegate after delegate parroted the catechism: ‘We need centralization’. Delegates from as far afield as the Army and the Caucasus linked the shortcomings of their organizations to lack of a strong hand in Moscow. A call for the strictest possible centralization by a delegate from Uzbekistan drew applause from the hall, and his description of decentralization’s evils all but suggested that the persistence of religion in Central Asia could be significantly countered by putting local anti-religious cells on a short leash.

Some limits to centralization existed. An amendment to the resolution on the League’s regulations that would have required confirmation of regional council elections by the Central Council in Moscow was rejected by the congress as risking ‘extraordinary centralization’. More importantly, some delegates saw centralization as a means by which their dissenting voices would be silenced. Delegates from the Ukraine, where efforts at local autonomy had been prominent in one form or

another since the Germans marched through during the First World War were particularly vocal in this matter. Although one Ukrainian delegate argued for a centralized, 'monolithic, battle-ready organization', another Ukrainian speaker, Petrov, all but declared that the Emperor had no clothes. He daringly charged that the Central Council was hiding behind calls for centralization. (The stenographic report notes disturbance in the hall after this comment.) Petrov observed that during two days of discussion not one delegate had criticized the Central Council. He offered an alternative proposal, that

the work of the League of the Godless should be constructed with regard to centralized general ideological and organizational leadership from the C[entral] C[ommittee], L[eague] of the G[odless], guaranteeing, as well as a unified line, responsibility for its execution by the republic councils.

Petrov further suggested that the League Central Council should link all the regional councils, apparently as an administrative entity rather than the locus of active leadership, and should be separated from the large RSFSR League organization. This wording would have left far greater responsibility with the republican councils than Yaroslavsky desired.

The reliance on centralization included within it the possibility of *oking the charge of deviationism as a powerful rhetorical weapon. In the context of the congress, the radicals appeared successful at putting the culturalists on the defensive by implying that the latter held a deviationist line. Meanwhile, they portrayed themselves as protectors of the party line. The Komsomol official Rakhmanov warned in his speech that the line of the party must be the line of the League and that the Komsomol would fight against any deviations from this line. This assertion was greeted by 'stormy applause'. In an act of false magnanimity, Rakhmanov announced that the Komsomol Central Committee did not consider the League Central Council's line to be deviationist, but his words rang hollow in the context of the congress. For his part, Yaroslavsky warned of factionalism: 'most dangerous [for the League is the possibility], in our own midst, unanimity on issues of conducting [anti-religious] work did not exist'.

Both sides frequently framed their criticism in terms of deviation by individuals from the correct institutional lines. We find the culturalists *akov and Yaroslavsky trying to patch up relations with the Komsomol by arguing that Bukhartsev's position was not that of his organization, *hough *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* quickly closed ranks and denied any division. Yaroslavsky later blamed the poor state of relations between the Central League Council and the Moscow League organization on perhaps the congress's leading irritant, Comrade Galaktionov. Yaroslavsky noted that where disagreements existed, they reflected the mistakes of individuals, that of the entire League. Taking aim at the hostile Moscow organization, Yaroslavsky charged that if Galaktionov were to renounce his anarchical phrases, anti-religious work in Moscow would benefit. Another League leader, F. Putintsev,

joined the fray by calling Galaktionov 'illiterate' in his work. He charged that Galaktionov was not a Marxist, and continued ranting until interrupted by cries from the floor, 'enough about Galaktionov'. Putintsev levelled a final charge against Galaktionov that in later years could be deadly: he claimed that Galaktionov's misinterpretation of sectarianism amounted to attacking a position of Comrade Stalin's voiced in 1925.

From the other side, the Komsomol Central Committee's representative – *the Congress, Rakhmanov, adopted similar tactics. His threats to the – League lurked thinly veiled, if at all, behind constructive criticism and – *presentation of an olive branch. Rakhmanov spoke of the 'unhealthy atmosphere' linking the League to the Komsomol and *Komsomol'skaya – Pravda*: 'We think that the All-Union Congress of the League of the – Godless will renounce any unhealthy attitudes held by individual delegates, and find a way to cooperate'. Rakhmanov charged that it was only logical to find errant individuals in such a large organization as the League. He admitted that the Komsomol had such individuals and battled with them. The League, he argued, should welcome the Komsomol's assistance in correcting individual members' mistakes. Rakhmanov was careful also to criticize anti-religious zealots, and to condemn exclusive reliance on administrative methods. On this issue, he claimed, the League and Komsomol Central Councils were united. In a more partisan turn, Rakhmanov defended Bukhartsev and charged that the latter's speech had been rudely interrupted; Rakhmanov added that he was sad to find 'people [at the Congress] who were trying to persecute the Komsomol'. This method of criticism, part of the broader Bolshevik emphasis on self-criticism, suggests that, in the evolving Soviet political culture, institutions could never err; only individuals in those institutions, or even leading them, could stray. This convention permitted the system to continue operating without criticism while individuals were held ultimately responsible for institutional practices beyond their control.

Subordination to the party constituted yet another powerful factor in Soviet political dialogue, and one that was clearly in evidence at the congress. Countless declarations of fealty to the party by Godless delegates indicate that party control had become a given, an abstraction unquestioningly accepted and integrated into the prevailing rhetoric. Certainly this understanding of the League's function was implicit in the numerous demands that the party line be followed exactly. On the level of explicit subordination, Yaroslavsky spoke of the League working closely with, i.e. under, the agitation-propaganda section of the party Central Committee; at another point he argued that local League cells should be under the direction of party and Komsomol members. Rakhmanov's insistence that the line of the party be the line of the League implied subordination, and by their repeated calls for the League to be *plus royaliste que le roi* (more royalist than the king) the interventionists sought to have the party, rather than the all but bourgeois educators of the League Central Council and the Commissariat of Enlightenment, direct the activities of the League. Certainly

the party was strongly represented at the congress, and the party fraction had nominated the slate for the congress's Presidium and the League Central Council.¹¹

By mid-1929, then, many of the hallmarks of the Stalinist political culture were already in place. On this level we see the insistence on a single, Leninist policy, implemented by centralized, factionless institutions led by the Communist Party. On another level, however, we can identify the continued existence as late as mid-1929 of quite conflicting policy alternatives being debated within this narrow, and presumably ever narrowing, framework. This complex situation simultaneously reflected and paralleled broader developments in society that influenced both the disagreements over policy and the pressures affecting all delegates – to the Godless congress to conform to a certain style of presentation. As for the policy differences, the legacy of past experience has already been discussed. More contemporary sources of conflict, with positions analogous to the ones held among the Godless, characterized the Soviet political realm.

The culturalist-interventionist debate mirrored the concomitant conflict at the apex of the political structure between the so-called Right opposition led by Nikolai Bukharin and the party line arbitrarily determined by Stalin. Bukharin favoured a more gradual, evolutionary transition to socialism, and his programme served as an analogue for the culturalists in the realm of high politics. In contrast, Stalin favoured a rapid social transformation according to the First Five-Year Plan. Stalin's vision of social change was highly politicized and, as such, it underpinned the zeal of the anti-religious interventionists.

This struggle for control of the party was raging exactly at the moment when the Godless convened their congress, and appreciation of the congress debates is impossible without understanding the backdrop against which they occurred. Immediately before the congress the Right had suffered a devastating setback. * At a combined plenum of the Central Committee and the Party Control Commission in April 1929, Bukharin was relieved of his duties as editor of *Pravda* and as Secretary of the Comintern. When Bukharin addressed the League of the Godless congress as the official representative from the CC and the Politburo (from which he would be removed in November 1929), his slide from power could not have gone unnoticed by the delegates. Although only a few references were made to Stalin during the congress, they identified him as *the* leader of the party, and a last-minute call for him to appear before the delegates resulted in their disappointment when informed that he could not attend.

While the development of the anti-religious campaign was closely tied to the political matrix in the party, it was perhaps even more dependent upon any decisions taken at higher levels on the direction of rural economic policy. Everyone at the congress knew that religion was primarily a rural issue. Whatever general policy the party adopted towards the countryside would directly determine the nature of anti-religious activity. Bukharin's vision of gradual evolution of private rural farmers into socialist producers corresponded to the culturalists' perspective. For the

interventionists, an activist policy to collectivize agriculture would represent authorization to eradicate religion as they saw fit: Like the political battle, with which it was intricately bound, the economic issue was being decided just as the congress met. The First Five-Year Plan as presented to the party in April 1929 envisioned moderate growth of cooperative and collective farms, but individual farming, with high taxes and other pressures brought to bear on the dreaded kulaks, was to have remained a major element in the rural economy. At the time of the congress in mid-June, official Soviet policy foresaw a pressured but still organic development of the rural sector where brute force would not be invoked to achieve social transformation. The threshold to a new policy of greater intervention seems to have been crossed at the *end* of June, some two weeks after the congress closed, when the Central Committee issued new policy guidelines that extended control over the peasantry and strengthened the collective farm movement. During that summer reports of forced collectivization initiated locally began to be received, but the *sploshnaya kollektivizatsiya* (total collectivization) was yet to come. “ Thus, the April plenum and the Sixteenth Party Conference (on the economy) that immediately followed the plenum left the future of the countryside in some question. Even as these economic debates transpired, tension grew as forced procurement and the resistance of the peasantry resulted in a crescendo of violence. This was the uncertain and fluid context in which the League held its congress. The congress did not bristle with discussion of collectivization, and although the ‘socialist offensive in the countryside’ was on every delegate's lips, the exact form of this campaign, that is the degree of intervention, remained unclear.

Given these divisions in the political realm, and considering the inherited conflict within the anti-religious camp, the debates between the Godless become comprehensible. What is perhaps more interesting is that while these divisions continued to exist, the pressures acting on Bolshevik political culture to arrive at a Stalinist mode of consensus were also clearly in evidence, not just at the congress as indicated here, but throughout Soviet political society. For instance, in regard to ‘deviation-ism’, the Sixteenth Conference in April 1929 had announced a general purge of the party to remove anyone determined ever to have opposed the party's position on any issue. Less than two, months later, when the congress met, the press bristled with discussion of the purge, which had been expanded to include non-party individuals working in Soviet bureaucracies. Following closely after the Shakhty trial of ‘wreckers’ in 1928, discussion of the new round of purging during the summer of 1929 gave a particular potency to labels like ‘deviationist’ and ‘appeaser’. Because the rules for purging were so broad and subjective, these labels became powerful political weapons distinct from any actual threat to the Soviet system.

The April 1929 Plenum also influenced how the delegates to the Godless congress perceived, or were supposed to perceive, the social transformation occurring in the Soviet Union. At this plenum Stalin launched his attack on Bukharin, in part

for not understanding that as the Soviet Union neared socialism, hostile capitalist elements in society would redouble their subversive efforts. He pointed to the Shakhty trial as an example and warned of wreckers operating throughout society. Stalin's – thesis of an 'intensifying class struggle' as socialism advanced served as the dominant rhetorical framework to explain the rising tension and open conflict in Soviet society. Although the policy implications of the April plenum remained potentially unclear to those below, the intensification thesis rapidly permeated the level of the Soviet apparatus represented by the Godless and set the tone for their congress less than two months later. The rapid adoption of this catch-all explanation for the difficulties facing Soviet society suggests that the existing political culture welcomed sophisms that, implausible as they might have been, offered complete and vivid explanations of social development.

The call for centralization repeatedly aired at the congress also reflected a similar strain in Bolshevik thought, both economic and political. The very essence of Bolshevik modernization plans meant centralizing the management of the economy to remove all elements of uncontrolled choice in production. Many delegates referred to integrating anti-religious activity into the five-year plan, to make anti-religious achievements as much a part of the plan as steel production. Centralization was also inherent in the Bolshevik political ethos. Lenin had insisted on centralized control of the party under tsarism, and once in power, the party had adopted an official plank forbidding intra-party factions at the X Congress in 1921. Stalin's outmanoeuvring of his opponents of the leadership during the 1920s was framed specifically in terms of observing party discipline. Factionalism constituted a serious breach of party unity, and Bukharin felt the potency of this weapon when, in addition to all his other sins, he was charged with contacting a former Bolshevik Party leader, Lev Kamenev, after the latter had been politically isolated.

The party's assumed control of the League indicates that the same totalist pretensions manifested by the party in regard to the economic and political spheres also extended to the realm of social policy, that is, beyond the party's preview narrowly defined. These totalist pretensions meant that the League of the Godless, an ostensibly private organization, would serve ideally as an extension of the party in an area of society not directly arrogated to itself. Whether the party achieved total control of the social sphere has been much debated, and so far the answer remains uncertain. What is clear is that in regard to religion, the intention was there.

Conclusion

The conflict between the Komsomol and the League certainly involved many elements: a history of confrontation, institutional tension and genuinely differing understandings of religion and its role in Soviet society. When we consider these arguments in broader terms, however, we cannot but note a significant division among Bolshevik activists over the more general issue of, how Soviet society should be managed. To shed light on the meaning of the culturalist-interventionist division,

one might return to the nearly parallel debate in the 1920s over economic growth between the 'geneticists' and the 'teleologists'.¹⁵ Like the geneticists, the culturalists thought in terms of evolution, organic development, and a pace of change based on honest recognition of constraints – in this case, the existence of large numbers of potentially hostile believers. While the culturalists advocated a hands-on approach to governing by which interference in individuals' lives for the purpose of directing their thinking and behaviour, was justified, even demanded, by their ideology, this effort would employ the media of words, education, persuasion and propaganda. It recognized that production of genuine atheists would require diligent work and patience.

The teleologists and interventionists, however, were less interested in method than in achieving a particular goal. Saddled with the exclusive blinders of political ideology, the interventionists perceived the problem of religion in a more direct manner. To destroy religious sects, close churches and imprison priests would achieve the goal of an atheist society. Goal preceded method, even if this method harboured potentially destabilizing consequences. Like the culturalists, the interventionists justified interference in the lives of individuals, but unlike the culturalists, they would use force and violence. They recognized no limits, organic or other, except the *elan* of their activists. Limitless faith justified the use of any means to construct socialism.¹⁶ In the end the teleologists prevailed in the economic realm as Stalin opted for nearly fantastic growth rates to the First Five-Year Plan, to be realized through rapid industrialisation and forced collectivization.

Who emerged victorious in the anti-religious debates? In light of Yaroslavsky's position, it comes as no surprise that the resolutions adopted by the congress tended to support the culturalist programme.¹⁷ Upon reading them, one is struck by how formulaically they were crafted. Here too, certain conventions in the proclamation of policy had been adopted: loud opening statements in line with official dogma, followed several paragraphs later by carefully phrased qualifications and criticisms. The main resolution on anti-religious work opened with fire and brimstone: religious organizations were calculating counterrevolutionary groups actively seeking through devious machinations to depose Bolshevism. With only minimal contradiction, the resolution then hailed the progress made against religion in the Soviet period. These matters now aside, the rest of the resolution addressed specific issues such as combating religious holidays, propaganda work among women and youth, better training of activist, further development of propaganda forms such as art, film, lectures and museums – all points on the culturalist agenda. The congress' – resolution on sects adopted a similar tack. The opening points proclaimed that sects were the weapon of capitalist elements in society; next it noted the general success of socialism in overcoming sectarianism. The rest of the document reveals an approach to sects that incorporated the educative, propagandistic approach to combating religion, while still acknowledging the role

played by administrative action. The other resolutions on agitation among national minorities, youth, peasants and women did not differ significantly from this pattern.

The culturalists may have won the battle at this congress, but ironically they lost the larger war. Changes in the legal status of religion in 1929 and the forced closing of churches and exiling of priests during collectivization and dekulakization struck a tremendous blow against popular religious expression. More broadly, the turmoil of the cultural revolution, in which the Komsomol played a leading role in undermining institutions and organizations it saw as bureaucratic and/or bourgeois, and the eventual full crystallization of Stalinism during the 1930s, meant that administrative measures and compulsion would ultimately play a key role in Soviet efforts to engineer a socialist society. The fate of the Godless in the 1930s is not our immediate concern, however. More important is what we can learn from this snapshot of the Soviet apparatus during the crucial summer of 1929.

First, ferment and division characterized the Soviet polity, but the causes of this situation are more difficult to identify clearly. Several have been suggested in the Fitzpatrick volume on cultural revolution.¹⁸ Certainly generational factors may have played a role.¹⁹ Although there is no indication of the ages of Galaktionov, Rakhmanov or Bukhartsev, they were hardly likely to be as old as Yaroslavsky, Lunacharsky (who were, respectively, 51 and 54 at the time of the congress), or other members of the central League leadership. An impatience among younger activists with the evolution of society in the NEP period could understandably have resulted in a determination to take matters into hand immediately and to reject the slower, education-based methods advocated by older revolutionaries. Whatever the source, the hostilities at the Second Congress of the League of the Godless revealed a divided activist body with opposing sides clashing in a highly charged atmosphere. This should provide further evidence that the cultural revolution of 1928-32 cannot be explained entirely as a phenomenon inspired and directed from above. While legal and constitutional changes in the status of religion in 1929 sent signals from the state to the activists below, there was clearly a movement already present within the anti-religious community for a shift towards a more directly interventionist, more openly political management of society. The state, defined here as the uppermost echelon of political authority, was either in accord with or encouraging its lower-level activists, especially the Komsomol, against its own middle-level bureaucracy.²⁰

A second, closely related, conclusion concerns the nature of politics in the early Stalin period. The debate at the congress reveals that, despite the rapid internalization of certain political and rhetorical conventions later closely identified with Stalinism, the level of Soviet apparatus represented at the congress was not without its clashes and spirited debates. Nor do these debates portray a society moving inevitably towards collectivization and Stalin's dictatorship. While even a gathering such as this was dominated by important officials such as Yaroslavsky and Rakhmanov, the text of the stenographic report yields extensive, if less articulate,

debate. Frenzy gripped the activist body, and its eventual outcome remained hidden from general view. There were no clear signposts to the future, and although each delegate heralded the rapid advance of socialism, their speeches did not assume the advent of Stalinism. Again, it is worth noting that a social transformation on the scale undertaken in the Soviet Union had never before been attempted. The acrimonious debates at the congress indicate that the activists did not share a vision of inevitable development (beyond vague conceptions of socialism) based on forced collectivization and a cult of the Leader. Their debates reveal, however, a political culture strongly predisposed to the dictates of a doctrine as expressed by the party line. Once articulated, these tenets would become unassailable, and the key challenge centred on being in the position to have one's interpretation of the party line generally accepted.

Thirdly, because the broad ideology motivating these activists insisted on the eventual eradication of traditional religious beliefs and practices, the debates over achieving this goal shed light on the process of secularization as part of a campaign of social engineering. As manifested at the congress, the preferred Bolshevik means to the end of an atheist society stood in stark contrast to the Marxist analysis of religion. Both culturalists and interventionists clashed on a theoretical level with orthodox Marxism that interpreted religion and culture as reflections of a particular mode of production. Changes in the mode of production would result in changes in society and religion. The achievement of communism would spell the final demise of religion that had earlier served to distract workers from the class struggle. What the culturalists proposed to do in the 1920s represented a reversal of causality. They argued that attacking religion could be done independently of material circumstance and could even aid the construction of communal production. While Lunacharsky acknowledged that only the full implementation of socialism would result in the complete eradication of religion, he continued:

This does not mean that we should say that, as long as we have not changed the economic conditions and everyday conditions from which religion grows inevitably, there is nothing for us to say about methods of cultural influence on people who are the victims of religion, or political influence in the form of a most direct battle against those people who sow religious prejudices and who reap the harvest of their evil crops.

In this passage, Lunacharsky protected himself *by* justifying both cultural and political forms of agitation. Referring directly to Marx, Lunacharsky spoke of the need to change consciousness since it lagged behind the material structure, but 'sometimes it outpaces the speed of things'. Lunacharsky argued that changing consciousness through enlightenment and cultural work was a pressing need even after a workers' government had taken political control of the nation. To wait for socialism to destroy religion meant rejection of Leninism in favour of Menshevism. Here was the basic justification of propaganda work throughout the 1920s: con-

sciousness was not dependent entirely on economic circumstances. In fact, the position of superstructure and base had been reversed.

Similar though less sophisticated explanations were advanced by the interventionists to justify their activism. They claimed that priests and religious leaders were deliberately undermining the reconstruction of the countryside and sabotaging industry. To expunge these harmful elements would advance socialism. This perhaps was the single point of agreement between the culturalists and interventionists. While both paid lip service to the importance of economic relations, both in fact followed agendas that posited the superstructure as more important. Both groups followed closely on the coat-tails of Lenin, who, in light of Russia's position in the international economic system and her particular development, had justified a political coup in a country that was unprepared in Marxist developmental terms for socialism. Twelve years later the country was still unprepared, and Soviet activists of varying persuasions were ready to advocate political or cultural methods of work. By this time, of course, industrialization had begun and the cooperative movement and collective farms were appearing in the countryside. These developments contributed to the contemporary justification for anti-religious activity by allowing the charge that the clergy and religious organizations were obstructing the building of socialism by opposing cooperatives and collective farms.

The delegates to the congress rallied around two distinct methods of overcoming religion, both broadly fitting into a Leninist framework, and both having rejected the traditional Marxist prescription for religion. Clearly, the Soviet view of the secularization process turned on highly engaged strategies, one employing education, the other favouring physical intervention. How do these methods compare with other efforts at secularization? As in the case of the USSR, the best opportunities to examine rapid, planned secularization campaigns are to be found in those instances when a government comes to power armed with an ideology hostile to religion. In modern history, this has necessarily meant a revolutionary situation such as occurred in France, China or Cuba.²² While these revolutions were firmly rooted in their respective indigenous cultures, analysis of the strategies employed to combat religion in these cases and in the USSR should further our understanding both of secularization and social engineering. Is there a similar pattern of anti-clericalism evinced in all these instances? Do the ruling revolutionaries in each case agree on the exact nature of the atheism to replace the inherited religion? To what extent does the culture of each nation influence or even determine the anti-religious strategies employed by revolutionaries? French anti-clericalism might parallel the position of the Soviet 'interventionists', but the rapid creation of secular rituals in France and the genuflecting before the God of Reason exhibited several assumptions apparently shared by the 'culturalists'. Even without the comparative examples, the zigzag pattern of Soviet anti-religious policy up to 1929 should serve

as a corrective against assuming a single, natural pattern of socially engineered secularization.

Finally, exegesis of the congress stenographic report reveals that the rhetoric employed during the debates did not entirely serve the instrumental function of articulating ideological and institutional positions. It also played a crucial role in those debates as the important high ground which both sides sought to control. The frequent and indiscriminate use of Leninist rhetoric to fight internal battles alerts us to the subjectivity of this language. Certainly the battle for 'Lenin' represented genuine ideological differences, and the tenets of centralization and subordination to the party reflected very real historical conditions, but the struggle to control the meaning of words such as 'Leninist', 'socialist', 'the party line' and 'deviationism' provided the framework in which actual differences in policy were debated. While the divisions were real, their expression in vivid terms close to the heart of Bolshevism exaggerated those disagreements and altered the differences between policy alternatives. There existed a tension between the necessity to operate within a narrow framework and the desire to set out a distinct programme. Because justification of almost any partisan position could draw on a variety of statements by Lenin and the confusing legacy of anti-religious experience, the battle to determine Lenin's *real* position, the *real* party line on religion, etc., came to dominate the congress; hence the efforts to invoke Lenin's name, to declare one's loyalty to the party line whatever it might be and to charge one's opponents with deviationism.

There is no reason to believe that this tension between rhetorical constraints and the need to express differing policy views was limited to the anti-religious field. Indeed, all regime activists had to operate within this rhetorical framework. Whereas the Fitzpatrick volume on the – cultural revolution has identified a number of professions in which tensions rose to the surface, we ought to consider returning and examining the early Stalin period anew to seek additional evidence of distinctive policy disagreements glossed over by a thin coating of rhetorically forged, ideological consensus.

More generally, the language of Soviet life and political development in the 1920s and 1930s provides a remarkably rich field for analysis. Our understanding of this period may well benefit from a closer examination of Soviet political and social discourse. The Soviet Union at this time offered a vast array of stunning images purveyed through a variety of media, such as photographs, rituals, portraits, parades and the daily language and practice of political life.²³ In one specific matter, the leaders of the League showed themselves aware of the power of images propagated through language. The proposal from a Northern Region delegate to change the League's name to the League of Militant (*voinstvuyushchikh*) Godless elicited no reaction at the time, but soon after the congress closed on 15 June 1929 the new name had been adopted as an appropriate title for a social organization embroiled in the cultural revolution.

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1. No comprehensive study of the Soviet anti-religious movement in the 1920s exists. Numerous Western works have charted the course of the Russian Orthodox Church under Soviet rule, but far fewer have examined efforts to promote atheism in the first decades of Soviet rule. Although dated, the best introduction to the subject can be found in John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State* (Boston, MA, 1953). Richard Stites has a chapter on the Godless in his study of Soviet utopianism, *Revolutionary Dreams* (New York, 1989). Glennys Young, 'Rural Religion and Soviet Power' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 1989), charts elements of the anti-religious campaign. Dmitri Pospelovsky's three-volume history, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer* (New York, 1987, 1988); vol. 1: *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Anti-religious Policies*, vol. 2: *Anti-religious Campaigns and Persecutions*; vol. 3: *Soviet Studies on the Church and the Believer's Response to Atheism*, focuses primarily on the post-Second World War but devotes some attention, and unsparing criticism to Soviet policy to the interwar period. See also Joan Delaney, 'The Origins of Soviet Anti-religious Organizations', in Richard Marshall, Jr., ed., *Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union* (Chicago, IL, 1971); Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat* (Princeton, NJ, 1974); Christel Lane, – *The Rites of Rulers* (Cambridge, 1981) and David Powell, *Anti-religious Propaganda in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA, 1975).

Soviet coverage is extremely limited and concentrates on official proclamations and programmes rather than on believer response or continuing popular religious expression.

2. The legal framework and policy guidelines established in the first few years of Soviet power remained in force until the end of the 1920s. In 1928 the Commissariat of Enlightenment replaced its 'a religious education' policy with an 'anti-religious' policy. In April 1929 the decree 'On Religious Associations' further limited opportunities for religious expression; and just one month before the opening of the League of the Godless Congress, the Sixteenth Congress of Soviets altered the Soviet Constitution to remove freedom of religious propaganda from constitutional protection. See Joshua Rothenburg, 'The Legal Status of Religion in the Soviet Union', in Marshall, Jr., ed., *Aspect of Religion*, pp. 61-102.

3. In the mid-1920s several factions of clergy vied for administrative control of the Orthodox church. The 'Renovationists' Struggle', though it involved high church politics, did not constitute a new period in religious life as experienced at the parish level. See Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State*, pp. 129-95, and

Dmitri Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982* (New York, 1984), pp. 43-162.

4. The Komsomol presented itself as the ideal vehicle for anti-religious agitation. Inspired to recreate Soviet society and energized by young activists, the Komsomol should have taken the lead in such enterprises as secularization, and indeed it orchestrated burlesque Christmas and Easter Carnivals in 1922 and 1923. The carnivals included disruption of Christmas services and assaults on worshippers. This form of direct confrontation, however, was deemed by the party's anti-religious commission to be counterproductive and shortly thereafter ceased in its original form. Perhaps this early reining in of the Komsomol explains its failure to become the institutional centre of anti-religious efforts, but for whatever reason, when the Komsomol returned to the anti-religious debate as a vocal participant at the end of the 1920s, it advocated a radical, direct action approach.

5. Yaroslavsky (1878-1943), born Minei Izraelevich Gubelmann, played a key-role in the appearance of Soviet anti-religious propaganda. He edited and penned numerous anti-religious propaganda oversaw the establishment of the League, controlled the Second Congress, and continued as the leading Soviet anti-religious figure into the 1930s. In addition to his anti-religious responsibilities, Yaroslavsky served on many editorial boards and wrote a number of histories of the Communist Party. As a member of the Party Control Commission, he appears to have been an enthusiastic inquisitor during the Purges in the 1930s.

6. Culture, or the lack thereof (*bezkul'tur'e*), is a frequently encountered term in debates in the 1920s and 1930s. It signifies something far broader than the English usage of words. Not limited to one's exposure to high culture, culturedness indicates a much broader measurement of development encompassing knowledge, behaviour and attitudes.

One sees here remnants of the Godbuilding controversy early in the century involving Lunacharsky, Lenin, Gorky and Bogdanov. See Christopher Read, *Religion, Revolution, and the Russian Intelligentsia, 1900-1912* (Totowa, NJ, – 1979), pp. 77-95. Pospelovsky's rendition of the culturalist argument can be found in vol. 1, pp. 51-2.

8. For a description of the Komsomol's Easter and Christmas campaigns, see Pospelovsky, vol. 2, p. 44, and Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, pp. 109-10.

9. On this development, see Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA, 1983).

10. The Lenin quotation reads: 'the centre of gravity for us has shifted to culture building, to peaceful, organizational, cultural work' (p. 273).

11. According to Kobetsky of the Mandate Commission, of the 956 congress delegates, 460 were members or candidate members of the party, and 50 more belonged to the Komsomol (p. 336); we may presume that party representation in the Congress Presidium was even greater.

12. As early as 1928 Stalin had targeted the Moscow Party organization leader, Nikolai Uglanov, for removal because of his support for the right. It is of interest to note the contrast between Uglanov's alliance with Bukharin at one level and the hostile attitude of the lower-level Moscow anti-religious activists towards the gradualist League Central Council.

13. Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivisation* (London, 1968), p. 406. See also Lynn Viola, 'The Campaign to Eliminate the Kulak as a Class, Winter 1929-1930: A Re-evaluation of the Legislation', *Slavic Review*, 45, 3 (Fall, 1986), pp. 508, 512, 522.

14. For a first step into this voluminous literature, see the discussions of Stalinism in *Russian Review*, 45 (1986), pp. 357-413, and 46 (1987), pp. 375-421.

15. See Alexander Erlich, *The Soviet Industrialization Debate: 1924-1928* (Cambridge, MA, 1960).

16. As one Bolshevik activist later recalled: 'With the rest of my generation, I firmly believed that the ends justified the means. Our great goal was the universal triumph of Communism, and for the sake of that goal everything was permissible ... And to hesitate or doubt about all this was to give in to "intellectual squeamishness" and "stupid liberalism", the attributes of people who "could not see the forest for the trees"'. Lev Kopelev, *To be Preserved Forever*, trans. Anthony Austin (Philadelphia, PA, 1971), p. 11.

17. For Pospelovsky's commentary on the congress resolutions, see vol. 1, pp. 55-60.

18. Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia* (Bloomington, IN, 1978).

19. Of 920 delegates, 18 per cent were less than 23 years old, 63 per cent were between 23 and 40, and 19 per cent were older than 40.

20. Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Cultural Revolution as Class War', in Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Revolution*, p. 25.

21. David McLellan, *Marxism and Religion* (London, 1987).

22. On the example perhaps closest to the Soviet, see Mona Azouf's entry on 'Revolutionary Religion' in Francois Furet and Mona Azouf, eds, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1989); Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religions and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca, NY, 1990).

23. Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, analyses Soviet rituals in the post-Second World War period but she discusses their appearance in the 1920s and 1930s. There is also the substantial work of Richard Stites in *Revolutionary Dreams*, 'Adorning the Russian Revolution: The Primary Symbols of Bolshevism, 1917-1918', *Sbornik of the Group for the Study of the Russian Revolution*, 10 (Summer, 1984), and 'Iconoclastic Currents in the Russian Revolution: Destroying and Preserving the Past' in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (eds), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, IN, 1985).