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## **Between Stalin and Christ: the Religious Socialisation of Children in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia**

### **Introduction: The personal history of religious socialisation in the ‘land of mass atheism’**

In his memoirs of his childhood – otherwise an entirely secular text – the poet Naum Korzhavin, born in 1925, includes a vignette of how he, a boy growing up in a Jewish family and brought up to believe in God, had a change of heart when he began attending a Soviet kindergarten. On the very first day, he heard from the teacher there that there was no God, and realised that all the children except him already knew this, making him the odd one out, on a par with landowners and capitalists, who deceived unenlightened, illiterate, backward people with such tales. The boy decided his parents were not ‘conscious deceivers’, but were unenlightened and backward. He started to wage a war with the believers around him: he began scattering breadcrumbs in the Passover vessels, something which is absolutely forbidden, and is blasphemous in terms of the Jewish faith: leavened bread should not come into contact with Passover foods. In due course, the young Naum tried to start a full-blown argument with his grandfather, but had absolutely no luck, getting caught up in explanations and proofs of the non-

existence of God. Starting to despair, he tried the opposite tack: OK, so maybe I can't yet prove clearly or convincingly that there isn't a God, but you, Grandpa, you just try and prove that there *is*!... But here too Naum's grandfather floored his young atheist opponent. He calmly said: '*But surely I never said that I know that God exists? I simply believe that he exists*'. Though young Naum didn't go back on his atheism, this was, he writes the first time he had ever felt a sense of respect for anyone else's point of view: the significance of his Grandfather's words had shaken the young boy [KorzHAVIN 1992: 167].<sup>1</sup>

This episode, from the first half of the 1930s, captures in a nutshell the history of the interaction between Soviet childhood and religion, faith, atheism, the party's educational policies and so on, as well as the historical and anthropological peculiarities of the child's consciousness in twentieth-century Russia, of the various adult worlds and how they related to the child's world, and through the domain of childhood to each other. And from this example one can also see the diverse possibilities of autobiographical texts for the reconstruction of the history of religious socialisation of different generations of Russian society.

### **The context (autobiographical documents and research into the history of religious socialisation)**

Scholarship is currently increasingly coming to focus on the life story of concrete individuals, the history of representations of his acquisition of literacy, culture and confessional identity.<sup>2</sup> Biographical and autobiographical materials constitute one of the most important ways to reconstruct these individual and group behaviours. In Germany, and to a certain extent in Russia, this tendency has been called 'empirically orientated pedagogical anthropology' ([Zdarzil 1975]; [Forster, Alzwanger 2000]; [Miller-Kipp 1992]). Within this field of research, a special place is set aside for investigation of the historical dynamics of religious socialisation within diverse educational systems. But how are we to study religious socialisation?

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<sup>1</sup> Anti-religious work with children was carried out very thoroughly by Russian kindergartens in the 1920s. Responding to the ideas current in GUS (the State Scholarly Council, the most radical section of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment), the organisers and teachers of nursery schools had to determine their positions with regard to this issue. See the discussion of the work of M. Kh. Sventitskaya, who regarded small children as a 'tabula rasa' – 'children have no innate religious feeling' – in [Kirschenbaum 2001: 127]. (My thanks to Catriona Kelly for making this study available to me.) The unsatisfactory results of attempts to weed out religion in turn fostered the spread of discussions pointing in precisely the opposite direction, about how 'religion and the church are phenomena with deep roots, and are profoundly linked with emotions and with spiritual experiences' [Kuroedov 1981].

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. [Henningen 1981].

The religious experience of the individual self is something which, more than any other aspect of personal experience, is hidden from others. The mystery of faith takes place *within* – within the place of worship, just as within the self. One can only enter if invited. For this reason, stories by real-life individuals, autobiographies, or what in Russian are termed ‘ego-documents’, play an extremely important role. They represent detailed sources allowing us to reconstruct the processes of religious socialisation, remembered and described from the point of view of the person who experienced it; they illuminate their preferred values and aesthetic stereotypes of narration, within the linguistic-cultural context of its verbal refraction in words.

Autobiographical narratives which touch on questions of faith usually recount the first visit to the church, the first communion; supernatural occurrences, such as hearing voices of God or the Devil, or apparitions, calls to something; particular personal changes: sudden miraculous feelings of wholeness and so on; divine responses to children’s appeals; searches for divine protection from the everyday difficulties of childhood; victories over oppressors; reactions to members of the clergy. They also describe appeals to God at difficult times, especially deep moments of enlightenment or penetrating thoughts about God; the reconstruction of moments of religious ecstasy or feelings of oneness with God and the universe; and many other such episodes. All these testimonies have a hierarchy of aims: to move from a story that only concerns a single person’s religious experience to a demonstration in one’s discourse of a model of conduct, demanded by (and for) others (i.e. the readership).

Until the 1960s or so, texts about the personal experience of religious socialisation were not accorded especially great importance in academic studies. Individual narratives about the self were primarily used (if they were used at all) to illustrate general points (and later, as statistical, survey and experimental methods became more widespread, to amplify survey or laboratory data). Evidently, this attitude toward personal narratives (and especially towards autobiography) derived above all from the emphasis of autobiographical, retrospective descriptions on the wisdom of Providence. A whole experience right up till the moment when the story was set down in oral or written form was presented from a perspective shaped by the religious beliefs of the author during the time of writing. Researchers were particularly cautious about using confessional autobiography because of the large number of extraordinary and supernatural occurrences with which the religiously-orientated narrators of these stories filled their texts. It was thought that this abundance of supernatural narratives simply expressed how much the author had been indoctrinated into the beliefs of one or another religion. Consequently, for researchers of the first half of the twentieth century, such narratives of the self were dismissed as unreliable or

fantastical, and firmly consigned to a marginal role, deemed lacking in authority [Baird 1970; Bowden 1971; May 1965; Olmstead 1960].

In the 1960s, the first signs of interest in personal religious history emerged on the part of religion experts, historians and anthropologists. These were stimulated by the publication of research on this theme by psychologists, among whom this intellectual tradition went back as far as William James [Meissner 1961: 16-21].<sup>1</sup> But, in contrast to James, the focus here was not the religious affiliation of the narrator, or any extraordinary manifestations of religious feeling, but rather the personal faith and personal experiences of the most ordinary of people [Needleman 1970; Ellwood 1973; Wuthow 1978]. The works of Antony Wallace, Eric Erikson, and Mary Douglas, which showed a direct link between personal religious experience, individual spiritual development and social changes in history, and the links between symbolic systems in 'I-concept' and social structures, turned the attention of researchers toward research into personal religiosity ([Wallace 1956]; [Erikson 1958, 1969]; [Encounter 1977]; [Douglas 1970]; see also [Turner 1969]). Such changes were reflected in historical and pedagogical research and projects in pedagogical anthropology. Investigators were particularly interested in information about models of the divine which adults presented to children, the ways children were told to relate to them, and how they in fact related to them.

Memoirs about childhood can give us a great deal of useful information about the ideas and practices of the adult world directed at children, about those kinds of religious belief or atheism which existed in children's proximate surroundings, with which they interacted, and against which they gauged the expression of their own feelings, even about those types of atheism which were thought to be 'natural for humans', appearing in Soviet times in the 'new' 'human material' into which it was 'planned' to transform the child. By studying memoirs, it becomes clear that it was precisely adults who expected children of one or another age to tell them what was allowed and what was not, what it was possible to talk about, and what it was not – and even what one should or could mention in the first place.

At the same time, memoirs about childhood are heavily coloured by the whole subsequent biography of the person, right up to the moment they start to write about childhood. Authors of biographical tales structure their textual space according to confessional and general cultural stereotypes of child religiosity, and to the 'correct biography' which is acceptable to society and to the family of the narrator.

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<sup>1</sup> See also the special number of *The Journal of Moral Education* 2003. No. 32. Issue 4, dedicated to the centenary of the publication of James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

For many narrators, the narrative of religious socialisation bears the hallmark of a religious text, aimed at a religiously orientated audience. However, many narratives with information about religious socialisation are not stamped with the author's inner religious beliefs, and as a result, the theme of religious belief is closely bound up with other questions. The religious person aims to inspire, to prophesy, making of his own naturally unfolding life a kind of unnatural example. If, for non-religious narratives, it is unnatural to focus specially on religion, in religious narratives, it is entirely natural for the narrator to talk about moments which are important to the specialist in religious studies. The differences between the aims of these two types of text dictate different methodological approaches to them: one has to approach non-religious and religious texts differently.

A very vexed problem in researching memoirs about childhood is that of the internal and external mediator between the narrator and his audience. Internal mediators include the author-narrator as the creator of the complete text, uniting scattered fragments of memories into a single work; the 'internal reviewer', who dictates changes to the representation of memories according to aims external to the memories, for instance, prophecy, apologia, enlightenment, education, economics and so on, and also stereotypes about what is acceptable and what is not, what is considered primary and what is secondary and so on. The internal mediator can be the religious, professional, and everyday languages of the author, which define not only the form of expression, but also - through it - the content of the narrative; on the linguistic level, the mediator can also be the writer's abilities to express himself and his own level of indoctrination. The external mediator is usually the image of the audience for whom the text is intended, the editor, publisher, the person preparing the manuscript of childhood for publication, the journalist and so on. The ways in which the narrative of personal religious experience is transformed, by passing through all of these mediators, and the ways in which one might discover their influence, take them into account, and analyse them, both separately and as a whole, constitute a major methodological problem ([Tipson 1975]; [Proudfoot 1977]).

**'The ideal of Christian holiness has been supplanted by the image of the revolutionary student': the turn of the twentieth century**

Recollections of childhood testify to serious, major internal changes to religiosity beginning as early as the start of the twentieth century, as well as to the altering hierarchy of demands made by laypeople towards the Russian Orthodox Church and other denominations [McCleod 2000]. The lack of preparedness for these cultural shifts not only played a role in the secularisation of the population before

1917, but also underpinned the ideological battles of Soviet times, before the Second World War and also after this, when a revival of interest in religion and the church took place. One respondent born in 1941 recalled:

*One day Mother told me about her life in the early years, when she was working as a housekeeper for a 'pope' (as mother called him). This was still before 1917. The thing is, during Lent, no-one was allowed to eat meat, they had to fast. But Mother noticed how the priest would eat everything he liked during Lent, just like he would at any other time, including meat dishes. So she asked, 'Father, why are you eating meat when you're supposed to be fasting?' The priest replied that the congregation had to observe Lent, but he had to eat, because, without meat, he couldn't conduct the services, and, especially, he wouldn't have enough strength to sing in the church. Hearing this, I became even more convinced that there was no God and the issue stopped mattering so far as I was concerned, I simply stopped caring about it.<sup>1</sup>*

In memoirs from the turn of the century, descriptions of crises of faith, changes to religion and faith and the transition to atheism, all become more common. Particularly dangerous times for these crises were when the narrator was going through the years of adolescence and young adulthood. The individual's attention to problems of religious faith was sharpened. Normal, mechanical, previously unnoticed things suddenly provoked a completely different reaction. The individual started to ask a huge number of acute philosophical questions of himself and his surroundings. By no means did the environment always stand up to these enquiries. Not receiving the answers s/he was looking for, a boy or a girl would leave the church, proclaiming his or her negative opinion of the usual attitude to God and to relations with Him. This kind of situation became more of a social problem in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, as a result of the close links between the Orthodox Church and the state. One example will suffice. A nine-year-old boy, later to become the Soviet writer Vladimir Bakhmetyev (1885-1963), arrived at his local (Orthodox) church in 1904 to make his confession. Asked about his sins, he answered that his principal sin was that he didn't believe in God. The priest, terrified and taken aback, could find no other solution than to banish the young boy from the church, only pausing to strike him on the forehead with his crucifix. Vladimir stopped believing in God at once, and to all appearances, for good and all [*Priroda* 1998: 293].

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<sup>1</sup> Where not otherwise indicated, quotations are taken from interviews carried out by the author. The sex and age of the respondents is given in-text.

Crises of faith were probably more acute for the Orthodox mind, due to the sharp contrasts between right and wrong drawn by this, than they were for the Protestant or even the Catholic mind (on which see [Elkind 1961-1963]; [Stromberg 1993]; [Evasdaughter 1996]). They often led to a complete rejection of religion, because the individual church and the individual priest were not individuated in the Orthodox mindset, but rather acted as the representative of the collective principle, uniting and representing everyone, including the believer himself, who entered into this principle. If the representative of what I am linked to 'by blood ties' is bad, so is my faith, and so too is the church as a whole. The personification of religious experience in Protestantism, which values above all the importance of the personal attitude toward the faith and the significance of individual relationships with God, permitted a Protestant believer in most cases not to lose faith if he lost or changed his usual Church; this contrasts with the depersonalised believer of Orthodoxy, a creed which values the parish (community) and the stereotypes of church ritual, which functions as a sign of equality between parish, ritual, and religion as a whole, religion in principle.<sup>1</sup>

Memoirists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century who did retain and affirm their Orthodox faith often recall having a non-traditional religious upbringing from their mothers, educated members of the gentry. This in many cases helped them to overcome their crises of faith, without renouncing faith entirely. K.N. Leontyev (1831-1891), who ultimately became a monk in one of the Orthodox monasteries on Mount Athos, wrote of his mother:

*During my childhood, it was she, much more than to my father, who made sure that my impressions of religion were favourable. [...] She was religious, but not exactly Orthodox in her beliefs, indeed, not sufficiently so, one could say. For her, as for many other intelligent Russians at the time, Christianity took on a rather Protestant air. She only loved the aspect of Christianity that had to do with morality; she didn't care for the side of Christianity to do with piety. She wasn't the praying kind; she almost never observed Lent, and she didn't teach us to observe it, nor did she demand it of us...[Leontyev 2002: 100]<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> On the 'macro', state level, the issue of the ban on shifting from one denomination or faith to another that had obtained before 1917 was raised during the short period when the Provisional Government was in power (February-October 1917). The foundation for freedom of confession was laid by the transfer of the parish schools [which previously had been managed by the Synod, though state-supported] to the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment. This transfer was intended to be a first step in disestablishing the Orthodox Church. The secularisation of the state was in turn intended as a recognition of the new attitudes to religion obtaining in society at large ([Odintsov 2002]; [Redkina 1996]).

<sup>2</sup> At the time Leontyev was describing, such women's striving for active social involvement led some of them to Catholicism: see [Dmitrieva 1996]; [Chernykh 2001].



Sergei Evgenevich Trubetskoi (1890-1949) described his mother's style of upbringing thus:

*Religion lay at the heart of my mother's methods of upbringing. Religion was by no means formal, and not even all that traditionally religious, as it had been for previous generations. 'God is love', was the guiding principle of mother's religious consciousness, and naturally, of her work in bringing us up too. My mother's voice even took on a special tone when she read to us the New Testament passages about love, as the first and the most important commandment of the Lord [Priroda 1998: 278].*

Ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue were not part of Russian Orthodox doctrine or practice, which made things especially difficult during spiritual crises, and provoked a more marked drift to atheism in the Orthodox population than among members of other confessions of the time. Indeed, ironically enough, the strict rules on mono-confessionalism led to a very high percentage of complete apostates amongst students of spiritual seminaries, as is recollected by the future Soviet minister Anastas Mikoyan:

*At that time, I was naturally not given to thinking deeply about worship: doubts about the existence of God did not show themselves at this point. This continued until the second year of the seminary (1911: i.e. the second year of the basic level: there were four preparatory levels and seven basic ones), and my encounter with our then scripture teacher. This priest's attempts at edification did not convince me one iota. I started to quarrel with him during lessons. This annoyed the priest. My classmates got dragged into the quarrels too. I started to become a really passionate debater of the God question...*

Reading the works of Darwin and Timiryazev, popular at that time in radical circles, ultimately led this author to 'conscious atheism' [Mikoyan 1999: 29-31]. The impact of natural sciences literature of the materialist school, including, in addition to the above, Brem and Kaigorodov, in the context of traditional religiosity (of the different confessions present on the territory of the Russian Federation) led to secularisation on quite a large scale (left-wing sociological, philosophical, literary-critical, and artistic literature had similar effects). Reading such literature, simultaneously with attending the lessons of 'new teachers proselytising the ideology of the People's Will' [Deyateli 1927: 66 ff.], brought about, at the end of the 1880s, and especially from the end of the 1890s, a cooling off, an attitude of irony and disaffection towards religion amongst young people of 11-14 years of age, who tore off the 'shroud of religious romanticism', 'breaking', 'splitting' with religion, finishing with it, rejecting faith.



**'No sniff of any gods': behaviour models of the 1920s**

As the twentieth century got underway, these social divisions increased, a process that was both reflected in, and enhanced by, the weakening of religious feeling among children and young people that had characterised years between 1890 and 1910.<sup>1</sup> The 'new people' fighting against the *ancien régime*, the Bolshevik revolutionaries, had all in one way or another travelled the path from a primarily religious environment to a primarily godless one. Memoirs of exemplary 'functionaries' of the new world, published to mark the festivities of 1927, held up a sort of model for the transformation of all Soviet citizens, especially the young. The mid-1920s project to write autobiographies, or 'authorised biographies', of outstanding figures from the Communist Party, was extremely important and significant in many ways. The ways in which these 'actors of the USSR and October Revolution' represented their own past is of direct relevance to my work on the history of religious socialisation of children in the Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras.

In all, in preparing this paper, I made use of 239 written autobiographies and 201 interviews. I worked by selecting episodes and themes, and by carrying out discourse analysis on these. I worked both synchronically, comparing memoirs of representatives of one generation (the structure of their experience etc.), and diachronically, comparing memoirs of people belonging to different generations (investigating e.g. the development of 'master plots' linked with religious socialisation, and of the narratives associated with these). In the present article, I shall mainly discuss the period 1929 to 1972, addressing the subsequent decade only in a brief coda.

On 8 April 1929, a decree passed by the All-Soviet Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) and by the Council of People's Commissariats (SNK RSFSR), 'On Religious Associations', in practice put a stop to all religious education of children, even in private. The force of the 1929 decree was reaffirmed six decades later in a resolution of the Council on Religious Affairs entitled 'On the Validity of the Legislation on Religious Cults Relating to Children and Young People' (14 March 1972), issued in response to the growing pressure from society at large to loosen the grip of state atheism. Breach of the terms of the decree was deemed a criminal offence; it elevated to

<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the evidence about the weakening of religion is contradictory. The secondary literature runs the gamut between assertions that the process of secularisation was very marked (observations about *'the low impact of religious ideals on Russian youth'*) and assertions that right up to the Second World War, there were fewer child atheists than child members of Protestant and other sects, let alone of 'traditional faiths' [such as Orthodoxy, Catholicism etc.]: (see [Balashov 2003: 144]; [Rozhkov 2002: 174]; [Leonov 2003]).

state level the intensely anti-religious policies that the Communist Party leadership had initiated in 1964.

I aim here to analyse how children in Russia lived during those intervening 43 years. What memories did they retain of their religious (atheist) experiences, of the moral and intellectual education they underwent, and of the ways these interacted and conflicted with the values of the adult world?<sup>1</sup>

To begin the discussion, I shall return for a moment to the autobiographies of the ‘actors’ of the revolution and the young Soviet state. Contrary to my prior expectations that these people would in no way be inclined to talk about their attitudes to religion, it turned out that they were, on the contrary, perfectly happy to discuss these, but by addressing them in their own way – by and large, by tracing the process of their abandonment of faith in God and their rejection of religion, the assertion in their minds of the ‘new gospels’<sup>2</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup> The years between 1923 (when the Code of Practice of the United School of Labour was promulgated) and 1929, i.e. the period immediately preceding the period that I analyse here, could be described as the time when the entire mechanics of anti-religious education was set in place, when state actions against belief were pioneered. After 1929, not a single legal or political niche for religious education survived; but before this date, despite the activities of the State Anti-Religious Commission, founded in 1922, the provisions of the January 1918 decree allowing religious education in groups of no more than three, essentially remained untouched. Various resolutions by the Fifth and Eighth Department of the People’s Commissariat of Justice from 1920, 1921, and 1923, alongside decrees passed by VTsIK [the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party] and the commentaries to these published in 1926, affirmed the principle that religious education was permissible ‘outside school’. But these legal clarifications took place against the background of the multi-layered system of anti-religious propaganda and atheist education that was impacting on school education. After 1929, the two different areas – socialisation in schools and the transmission of religious values outside school – converged. Groups of three children receiving religious education were now seen as ‘a covert way of running church schools’, which of course ran contrary to the principle that schools and religion should be completely separate [Zakon o religioznykh ob’edineniyakh 1930: 11]. ‘The spectre of religious education’ went on bothering the authorities, especially when religious revivals made themselves felt. Thus, at the end of 1948, when the relaxation of prohibitions on religious practice that had been evident in 1943–1947 was brought to an end, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church was forced to ‘ban all sermons preached in churches that might be interpreted as offering religious instruction to children’ [Sovetskoe obshchestvo 1997: 345]. The remaining loophole – the fact that individual religious instruction was technically still legitimate – attracted attention during the next anti-religious campaign of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the journal *Sovetskoe pravo*, and at the Fourteenth Congress of the Komsomol in April 1962, it was emphasised that ‘no parent has the right to cripple his or her child in a spiritual sense’ (paradoxically enough, this assertion sat alongside one of a different order, ‘freedom of conscience does not extend to children’ (i.e., children did not have the right to declare that they believed in God, i.e. that they had the right to freely determine their own religion; thus it emerged that neither children nor adults had the right to lay claim to religious belief, nor to make declarations about this, nor to transmit it to one another). It was generally held (and this understanding was enforced in practice) that religious parents could be deprived of their parental rights; such parents would be summoned to their children’s school or to the police and intimidated by threats that their children would be placed in a boarding school. There is some evidence that such threats were at times carried out ([Shkarovsky 1999: 384]; [Lowrie, Fletcher: 141–5]). As is well known, the authorities also did their best to stop under-18s from attending church at all.

<sup>2</sup> This expression is taken from [Deyateli: 282]. Compare another analogous expression: ‘Christian Communism’ [Deyateli: 172]. N. B. Eismont describes Ludwig Büchner’s *Force and Matter*, alongside Aleksandr Bogdanov’s *An Elementary Course of Political Economy*, Plekhanov’s *The Development of the Monist View of History*, and Max Stirner’s *The Ego and its Own* as his ‘gospels’ [Deyateli: 265].

they were called to evangelise. Or else they might recount their education in religious schools, but play down the religious aspects of the schooling they received, emphasising their lack of reception or opposition to the teaching of religion, recounting their joy at transferring to a secular school and so on. Regardless of their individual circumstances, and family origins, all the narrators who describe this period recount how they, in an orderly fashion, had moved away from faith in God toward faith in the 'new commandments' of socialism, and had 'broken with' religion. In their stories about the departure from religious faith in childhood, we can identify some universals: 1. medical materialism: the departure from religion as a result of being attracted to materialist works from an early age, especially works of natural sciences, but also sociological, historical, artistic literature and left-wing critical literature (Bukharin, Gusev, Krzhizhanovsky, Lazarevich, Pestkovsky, Preobrazhensky, Raskolnikov, Chutskaev and others);<sup>1</sup> 2. the influence of a teacher or another 'significant adult' (Vatsestis, Krzhizhanovsky, Reisner, Saprnov and others); 3. the response to demands from members of a revolutionary, school, student or other group (Vainsthein, Smigla and many others); 4. hatred towards those who forced them to pray or to study religious subjects, or the adolescent hatred 'for almost everything' (Gusev, Dybenko, Miliutin, Raskolnikov, Samursky et al);<sup>2</sup> 5. observations of life of the priesthood from within or as a result of the regime of a religious academic institution (Lazarevich, Makharadze, Preobrazhensky, Samursky et al);<sup>3</sup> 5a. conflicts over the study of scripture, conflicts over the way it was taught, often exacerbated by the teachers' identifying the student as Godless or

<sup>1</sup> I will give only one quotation from Shtirner's book, which enjoyed huge popularity with young people in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: 'True fear of god has long been unsettled, and what is generally current today is more or less conscious atheism, which is outwardly expressed in the emergence, on a wide scale, of 'outside-the-church' activities [Shtirner 2001: 220]. The book, first published in 1844, originally had a quite different purpose, and one that was much less congenial to godlessness than was the interpretation that was common at the time of the book's second discovery in late nineteenth-century Russia and Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. The fashion for 'leaving one's faith under the influence of religion', initiated by editions such as the 'Granaty' dictionary Leaders of the USSR and the October Revolution in which Eismont, Latsis, Rakovsky, and others first published their autobiographies, was then taken up by Party bigwigs. K. E. Voroshilov, who in the 'Granaty' dictionary had briefly mentioned reading studies in the natural sciences as a step to breaking free of religion, was later, in his *Tales of My Life*, to give special attention to the role of being forced to look at saints' faces and so on, and to assert that it was not the fervent disputes about religion going on amongst workers so much as reading books such as Camille Flammarion's *Astronomie populaire*, Darwin, Elisée Reclus's *Nouvelle géographie universelle, la terre et les hommes* and so on that had made him realise the falsity of religion. The didactic autobiographer draws a conclusion that is delightful in its purity: 'Freeing oneself from religious idiocy is a long and complicated process; it comes about in a different way in everyone, and under different circumstances' [Voroshilov 1968: 70].

<sup>2</sup> [Deyateli: 39].

<sup>3</sup> The negative effects of observing the life of the clergy 'from outside' are reflected in the various peasant memoirs also collected for the 1927 jubilee of the Great October Revolution. See [Krestyane... 1929]

atheist (Aralov, Gusev, Kamo, Makharadze and others); 6. childish despair at the unenlightened life (including, for example, cursing God, deciding you want to be a socialist, because they don't believe in Him, even if this means being cruelly persecuted) [Lebedev, *Deyateli*: 286]; 7. the insistence of their mother or father, or both (Leplevsky, Martynov, Skrynik, Smigla et al); 7a or, more often, the influence of sibling (Uritsky and many others) 8. revolt against a family with strong religious beliefs (Skobelev, Smidovosh et al); 9 the replacement of Christian images by socialist ones, with the struggle for socialism acting as a continuation and replacement of religious faith because the given young person could see no connection between reality and the proclaimed evangelical ideas of care for our loved ones, and was ready to suffer for 'a just cause' following the example of early Christians (Svidersky, Smirnov, Shlyapnik and others).<sup>1</sup>

Often the reason for the turn toward atheism is not given, but there is talk of conflicts flaring up with parents, and also in school where, as a result of being behind in scripture, children are often kept back a year, or transferred into a more liberal academic institution. (According to the Bolshevik autobiographical canon, conflicts of this kind were a prerequisite, especially if the narrator remained in school after the first signs of religious disaffection (and above all in religious schools).) After the first moment of disaffection with the regime of the religious school and the particular denomination he or she belongs to, the narrator always goes on to emphasise a kind of escalating disobedience. If this was an obligatory feature, so too were complementary examples of positive attitudes, such as success in the general educational programme offered at the given religious educational institution. The relationship between the narrator and the church and religion is similar to his or her relationship with Tsarism, and with the oppressors of the workers and the toiling peasants, all being perceived as inimical to the successful development of the new man.

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<sup>1</sup> The fusion of an idiosyncratic perception of Christianity and oppositional, revolutionary sentiments also made itself felt in the process of 'asocialisation' among Soviet dissidents in the 1960s and 1970s. The well-known dissident V. Novodvorskaya has described this fairly fully: 'At seventeen... I happened on the Gospels and took Christ Himself as my confidant. Naturally, I absorbed nothing of the ideas of humility and universal forgiveness, whether then or now, but I started thinking of Christ as my comrade-in-arms, a view I still have. It's insufferably arrogant to admit this, but I even used to dream of him appearing to me and asking me when I would begin my revolutionary campaign to overthrow Soviet power' [Novodvorskaya 1993]. It is interesting to note that between the two waves of revolutionaries, those of the turn of the twentieth century and those of the 1960s and 1970s, lay the perfectly loyal, in Soviet terms, but also unacceptable to the Soviet authorities, ideas about Marx's indebtedness to Christ: Karl walking in the steps of Jesus. Ideas of this kind were even expressed in school magazines. However, the antagonism of the Communist struggle and Christianity was nevertheless a key point in Bolshevik propaganda. A typical slogan would read, 'So who is the real saviour of the world: Christ or the working class?' [Ryzhkov 2002: 155, 174].

Paradoxically enough, we are also able to see how naive children of the time viewed Communists, a view that stands in stark contrast to such self-descriptions. ‘The child’s perspective’ was monitored in two surveys of the late 1920s [Bernstein, Gelmont 1926; Epshtein 1928]. The opinions voiced are far from complimentary, as one might expect, and this is especially true of the earlier survey. According to its findings, 8% of children answered that a communist was a person ‘who was against God’ (7% said that that they were those who ‘don’t believe in God’ and ‘take gold out of the churches’). At the same time, almost 11% noted the communists were perpetuating long-held religious ideals: in their eyes, the Communist was ‘continuing in the footsteps of Christ,’ and 12% replied that the ‘communist is the tsar’. It would thus be reasonable to suppose that around one fifth of all children came from an environment governed by the idealised hope that the communists would reach the heavenly kingdom, and hoped for a continuation of the tradition of the theocratic state.

**‘Put an end to these outrages, rotting children’s minds’:  
(non)religious (de)socialization in Soviet Russia**

The sweeping secularisation of the population which began after the revolution led to a conflict between ideology and daily life, and also generated an opposition between the religious attitudes of the younger generation and those of all other generations. The second half of the 1920s and the start of the 1930s were marked by the formulation of a multi-layered and diverse system of anti-religious campaigns and didactic strategies. These included not only propaganda and agitation (the provision of ‘anti-religious hours’, ‘anti-religious excursions’ and so on), but also, for instance, interactive games, meant to prompt children to come up with possible models of behaviour for the ‘new child’, ways of rejecting the ‘old’ religious environment.

For example, in *Religion and Anti-religion in the Child’s Environment* (by S. M. Rives, 1930), the following examples of tasks for children were given (the author called this method the ‘method of conflict alternatives’):

*Zoya, Ira, and Nastya are sisters. They’re all non-believers, but when Easter came, each behaved differently,. The evening before Easter their mother said: ‘Children, let’s go to church first, and then we’ll have our Easter meal.’ Zoya replied: ‘I’m not going to church, I don’t want the Easter meal, I’m going to the club, to see an anti-religious play. And you should go too, ma.’ Ira replies: ‘I’m not going to church, but I will eat the Easter meal, because I love paskha and kulich’. Nastya says: ‘Mum, they’re both no good. I don’t believe in God either, but I’m not going to annoy you. I will eat the meal, and I’ll go to church too.’ How would you have acted? Why would you have behaved like that, and not any differently?*

Children engaged in this task in ‘mathematical ethics’ would have used logic and revolutionary consciousness (they were supposed to be one and the same thing), and would have justified their choice and decision, coming up with an algorithm of behaviour which would have rationally adhered to the required hierarchy of values and would have undermined the dangerous everyday family rituals, subjugating love for one’s parents to state (party) interests. This hierarchy of variants of conduct seemed superficially to have been worked out by children themselves, and in time it became an internalised mode of behaviour, grafted to a child’s personality and aiming to make the everyday life of this person and his or her whole family (if possible) completely non-religious. This proved to be a strong and active force in opposing the traditional influences of the family environment.

A respondent born in 1911, who spent his childhood in Perm province recalled that he and his family celebrated Easter:

*In our family, we loved Easter. Before Easter, the house had to be cleaned, and even the youngest children would take part. [...] we would sing the Easter chant ‘Christ is Risen from the dead’ [...] despite the fact that communists had banned church attendance and had absolutely banned the holiday, we went to church.*

But he also recalled that this was by no means universal (‘some people, especially the young, would spend Easter in the club’). Young people’s rejection of rituals with a marked religious character, the creation of a place suitable for the emergence of criticism of the authority of the elder generation, is confirmed by other sources, both narrative [Kozlova 1994: 118–46; Matveeva, Shlapentokh 2000: 105] and demographic [*Neuslyshannye golosa* 1929: 20]. Among the petitions and letters sent to the authorities via newspapers, as witnessed by the 1925 file of letters dispatched to Molotov through *The Peasant Newspaper*, were complaints from peasants about the collapse of traditional inter-generational relations with reference to religion:

*It’s essential to make sure that young people pay some attention to the authority of their elders and don’t ‘swear themselves blue in the face’ over everything they don’t like, and especially that they don’t poke fun at religious believers.<sup>1</sup>*

Atheist members of the Komsomol believed in the cleansing fire that would quickly bring them to Communism. Children living during those times recall the interest with which they watched the enormous bonfires set up in on the church steps, and how they would eagerly

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<sup>1</sup> It is very interesting that the unknown compiler of the file in question included these materials in a section labelled ‘useful suggestions’, and not ‘abuse’ [*Krestyanskie istorii* 2001: 208].

discuss the destruction of churches, joyfully sharing their impressions with one another.<sup>1</sup> Early Soviet youth was captivated by the slogan, ‘Havens of education, not havens of obfuscation!’, which raised the banner for the construction of new schools on the sites of demolished churches.<sup>2</sup> The pre-war gulf between the new generations of young atheists and the older generations of believers is borne out by statistics. The young population groups were, the less they participated in religious rituals (this was even true in villages), and youths and young men were quicker to turn to atheism than girls and young women.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the fact that the everyday life of personal and group existence was still religiously orientated presented a major obstacle to the Bolsheviks in the early years of Soviet power, getting in the way of all of their activities, both propagandistic and administrative, and even economic:

*It took us a long time to sort out the question of religious holidays. The authorities couldn't do a thing...each church had its village holiday...in each village there held their own devotional holidays... these involved some kind of prohibition, for example, a prohibition on cattle, so that there wouldn't be cattle plague (respondent born 1916) [Golosa krestyan 1996: 65–6].*

Thus, the religious character of everyday life lasted longer in rural areas, where, as late as the start of the 1930s, one could find major libraries of religious literature belonging to well-off peasants, which became important ‘sites of influence’ on the consciousness of children belonging to such families. Respondents who note their respect for religion during their childhood often mention the presence

<sup>1</sup> [Mirek 2000]. The author, born in 1922 or 1923, describes how a boy he was talking to, who had witnessed the Church of Christ Redeemer being blown up in Moscow [in 1934], said his father had told him ‘it was being done with the Party of Lenin’s blessing [!]’ (p. 279). The autobiographer also recalls about how, after he had twice visited (at his own wish) the exhibition of designs for the Palace of Soviets that was supposed to be built on the site, and to be the centre of *world* Communist unity, the group of twelve-year-olds he was with started dreaming up projects to demolish all the cathedrals, towers, and gates in Germany, France, and Italy – the symbols of the old, capitalist, exploitative world, subjecting its workers to ‘the opium of the people’ along with the rest (p. 285).

<sup>2</sup> This idea was to some extent incorporated into the Party programme after the summer 1928 Plenum of the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party, which had discussed how to deal with the shortage of premises for accommodating schools. In response to the statement by the chairman of Mossovet, K. V. Ukhanov, ‘We are building schools and pulling down churches,’ came a voice from the audience, ‘Then you should pull them down quicker and build them quicker!’ [*Chetvertyi plenum*: 143]. The exhortation, which was recorded in the official stenographic record, influenced the resolutions about what to build when churches were destroyed. A good number of 1930s schools were precisely built on the sites of demolished religious buildings [*Obrazovanie v Moskve* 2000: 130]. Thus, alongside the ‘liquidation of the memory of places’ by building clubs there existed the practice of building ‘havens of learning’ (the assumption was that true enlightenment could only be atheist).

<sup>3</sup> In 1934, 1 per cent of youths and 12 per cent of girls aged 16–24 from collective farms in the Central Black Earth Region observed religious rites, and 10 per cent of men and 38 per cent of women aged 25–29 [*Molodezh’ SSSR*: 286]; cf. [Fitzpatrick 1994].



of a library with religious literature. This associative link was no accident: 'In childhood, I loved Easter and understood what it meant. My grandfather was a real believer. He had a massive library of religious literature' (respondent b. 1918). Such libraries of sacred objects became famous as centres of pedagogical influence of one generation on another, even after 1929, when members of the clergy were banned from carrying out any form of religious instruction for young people under the age of 18.

### 'God is the enemy of the people'<sup>1</sup>

Children's institutions were used to penetrate into the 'everyday life' of religion, and to form active atheist attitudes amongst children. In interviews about the 1950s and 1960s, there are stories about how teachers at primary schools would find out from children each Monday which children had been to church with their grandmothers on Sunday. People answering in the affirmative were assiduously interrogated, their grandmothers were criticised as uneducated and ignorant, bent on deceiving their grandchildren. Children were persuaded to refuse to go out the next Sunday, and to say that they were Octobrists and would not go to church. At parents' meetings, the parents of such children would be interrogated as to why they had allowed their charges to go to church. In kindergartens, evening classes in atheism were organized ([Korzhavin 1992]; cf. [Traver 1989: 172]). Children themselves would compile lists of the names of classmates whom they had seen entering or leaving church. This was not considered informing or tale-telling, but rather an act of principle.<sup>2</sup>

Yet religion could also be practised privately. In fact, after 1917, ritual, which before the revolution had been interpreted as hindering individual self-expression, especially in educated circles with their sceptical attitude toward the church, began to be seen as an essential prop to the religious life of the people of Soviet Russia, a way of helping them not to lose their confessional identity:

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<sup>1</sup> This formula was still in use as late as the 1960s, by which time the formula 'enemy of the people' had otherwise disappeared: cf. the recollection of Galina R., born in 1954: 'They kept telling us there was no God [...] that God was the enemy of the people.'

<sup>2</sup> The adults such children later turned into are reluctant to recall things of this kind about themselves. But there are photographs on file showing children helping compile such lists. One of them shows a boy who is adding two more surnames to the two already written up (both of girls; his are male surnames). Unfortunately, it is now impossible to establish whether the children concerned really were church-goers, or whether this is a case of childish revenge for something else. The photograph appears in [Marek 2000: 235]. [One should also bear in mind that many archival photographs were precisely taken for agitational purposes, as a form of 'living poster'; the scene depicted may perfectly well have been staged. On this side of the photographic record, see Catriona Kelly. *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991*. New Haven, 2007. Annotations to illustrations.] [Editor].

*All the children in our family were christened, and always before their first birthday. During that time, the struggle with religion was going on, and so we didn't have a village priest. Children were christened secretly, several people in one house. For this purpose, a priest would come in from Perm (Respondent, b. 1920).*

This ritual, carried out by local society, presented an obstacle to the conflict between generations, or 'the removal of children from the coarse influence of their family'. Newspapers would write about rural Komsomol members along the following lines: 'there wasn't one instance when Komsomol spoke out against holidays of this kind [i.e. the feasts of local patron saints]'. In the press this non-action was interpreted as being explained by the fear of criticism, an interpretation that pointed to the fact that there was often a positive attitude toward religious upbringing in the countryside.

Recollections of the existence of religious holidays can be found in respondents from a wide span of generations, those born both before and after the Second World War. Indeed, references to such holidays dominate what informants say about religious topics. Sergei AS (born 1952), who spent his childhood in Udmurtiya, remembers:

*At Easter, when we went to bed, someone would put one or two painted eggs under our pillows. I recall one of the Easter games. Ten players would gather, each with ten eggs. The eggs would be placed in front of the players in a line, one metre apart. And they had to hit them with a ball. Whoever hit the most eggs could take them home with him. Usually, the whole village would come and watch the children playing. Although my parents weren't believers, and I didn't understand the meaning of the holiday when I was a child, I nonetheless loved that holiday and would look forward to it.*

The unofficial nature of this 'tasty',<sup>1</sup> 'happy' holiday, whose celebration was too widespread for it to be banned, and which was apparently considered relatively inoffensive (as long as no-one took it into their heads to attend church services) constitutes a unique case of transmission of a cultural text in a form that was not fully comprehensible even to its participants, but which would be deciphered, when domestic politics had changed in post-Soviet times, with the help of an external key, namely the revival of religious feeling and religious practices (along with their symbolic meanings).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An enormous quantity of food was prepared for Easter; New Year and Christmas are the only other holidays that were celebrated on this scale. Almost all memoirists recall the special atmosphere of Easter, the different games that were played, and so on, 'For me Easter means a radiant, pure, joyful holiday, a holiday when there was plenty to eat' (Valentina B., born 1954).

<sup>2</sup> In other words, those celebrating Easter often had no idea that they were celebrating a religious festival at all (painting eggs was simply seen as a Spring tradition), but once the religious revival took hold, such customs would be interpreted as having a religious significance after all. [Editor].

Of course, children's faith in the magical strength of religion, and children's capacity for engaging in close mutual relations with God (as expressed for instance in beliefs about the magic of the all-seeing eye, the person whom you could ask for anything, and it would be given, in the belief in miracles and so on) could support religious development. Yet they could also be used to convert the child or young person to communism, to draw him or her into the fight with 'ignorant' adults (remember Korzhavin and his battles with his grandfather, or the Soviet state figures who replaced biblical ideas with socialist ideas, as the best gospel for their minds). A respondent born in 1923 recalls the fervour of his classmates when he was in the ninth year of school, in 1939:

*How my classmates believed in the Komsomol, the party, Stalin, communism! How was it that my father, who was such a supporter of Soviet power, and of Stalin, had not managed to transmit to me that same faith? Doubts and questions, that no-one could assuage, would not let me join the Komsomol so wholeheartedly and with a clear conscience.*

Faith in God or in His absence were not always opposed to one another; in fact, they often co-existed in one and the same person (although of course, they did frequently conflict, and the higher, the more official the level of interpersonal relations, the more likely this was to happen). One respondent born in 1929 reconstructs the everyday life of his childhood as follows:

*In childhood, I must have believed in miracles, because I was always dreaming about some kind of miracle which I could have used to surprise my friends. My parents were not especially devout, although an icon hung in the corner with an icon-lamp in front of it.<sup>1</sup> My father was pretty much an atheist, we were all christened, but we didn't wear crosses and we didn't pray to God.*

In this world, atheism, the icon-lamp, christening, prayers and the lack of prayers could all co-exist haphazardly, in one and the same individual.

The everyday rituals following the cycle of church holidays defined even the lives of those people who were taking part in the state-wide destruction of churches. In their memories of childhood, female respondents born in 1931 recounted how one man celebrated Easter while he was on his way to pull down a church:

*Mother and father worked all their lives on the collective farm. I remember that mother was a believer, and we always had an icon-*

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<sup>1</sup> The icon-lamp is a crucial detail, because without it the icon might have had the character simply of a work of art, displayed alongside secular pictures as though one of them. [Editor].

*lamp at home. Before Easter everyone washed the house, and we tidied everything up. Throughout the night before the holiday, mother would cook...I remember as well that I loved to decorate eggs. I would drop candle-wax on to them and then would drop them into the dye, made of onion peel...but mother didn't go to church, and there wasn't a church at that point. I myself was involved in dismantling and tearing down the Holy Trinity Church. Of course, as a child, I didn't know what Easter meant, but we would look forward to it.*

Such diverse experiences of Easter could co-exist in the childhood of one person. Easter was celebrated nation-wide in the country of militant atheists.<sup>1</sup>

Everything that might in one way or another relate to religious faith was removed from children's surroundings. In children's literature, as was remembered by a woman born in 1930:

*Cuts were made not only for the sake of simplicity and accessibility, there were also cuts for other reasons – for instance, they took out words and expressions as God, Christ, Christmas, 'to make the sign of the cross' from Andersen's fairy-tales, and from Tolstoy's The Silver Skates<sup>2</sup> – everything to do with religion, you see, was an opiate. And how many works were just not published at all, or were not re-issued in further editions for all kinds of different reasons. Selma Lagerluf's Christ Legends, for instance, my mother managed to get hold of with difficulty from her friend and typed up a copy for me. Sienkiewicz's novel The Desert (*W pustyni i w puszczy*) was given to us for two days by Mother's friend from the institute who was working at that time in the closed section<sup>3</sup> of the Lenin Library. Later on I tried to get hold of it for my children, asked around all my friends, but it didn't appear in any of the complete works of the writer; it was first published only after perestroika [Baranovich-Polivanova 2001: 63-4].*

<sup>1</sup> Easter was celebrated even in difficult circumstances. 'My mother worked lumbering timber, she cut branches off trees before they were felled, my father died when I was young. We lived in a workers' settlement, there were no churches there, there weren't even any religious believers much. But I remember we used to have painted eggs for Easter. We had no oven, only a gas-ring, so we didn't bake. Mum would buy sweets and put those on the table. I can remember playing an Easter game too: you'd sit down opposite someone else and roll eggs at each other. If your egg smashed, you had to hand it over. The winner was the person who ended up with most eggs' (Ekaterina P., born 1953).

<sup>2</sup> An error of memory. *Hans Brinker, or the Silver Skates* is a well-known 1865 story by the American writer Mary Mapes Dodge. The informant may be referring to a translation into Russian by a 'Tolstoy' or 'Tolstaya'; more likely she has simply attributed a favourite book to Aleksei Tolstoy, the author of *Buratino*, a free adaptation of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> The *spetskhran*, the section where books banned from general release to readers were stored; they could be accessed by those who could produce a special reason why they wanted to consult such volumes. [Editor].

But what was it about Sienkiewicz's book in particular that so affected the writer that she had to find it at whatever cost for her children? Wasn't this a need for linguistic wholeness in the unconscious struggle against losing the old language and against the assertion of the new, areligious language? The very vocabulary to describe the divine was being taken out the language, or being completely revised:

*Int.:* So, for yourself did you clarify whether there was a God or not? Are you an atheist? Did you in some way define the issue for yourself, was that how it was?

*Inf.:* No, I never came up with any definitions, because the question never came up, not once. No, we didn't deal with it, we didn't talk about it, and all in all, that was the end of it. It was widely accepted that God didn't exist. That was it. [the speech here was rushed and indistinct, but the words no' and 'no God' were louder]. (Tatiana, Leningrad, 1953).

Many memoirs contain the phrase 'you weren't supposed to talk about God' (in the family, at school, on the street). Outside of the linguistic context, a person was consequently unable not only to enter into communication, but even to think about this 'unnamed' entity 'without a name'. The ideologists understood that you could only discuss a thing for which you had the linguistic resources. They created the resources of newspeak and enacted a policy of destroying 'harmful' resources of 'oldspeak', changing the meanings of words and/or forbidding their use. Every decade in the history of Soviet Russia was marked by its own revisions of 'oldspeak', and its own neologisms and rules for their use.

Children's visual language was also changed. We know a great deal about the fight against churches, but we know less about how schools adjacent to still operating churches were transformed into strongholds of atheism and atheist propaganda. We also know very little about how the interiors of state and social institutions – which had not in any way, so far as I know, been previously linked to religion<sup>1</sup> – were transformed into spaces of atheist propaganda and indoctrination. For instance, the walls of playrooms in clinics for babies and children not only had posters about hygiene and correct nutrition, but also medical material in a 'spiritual', that is, of course, an anti-religious vein: 'A grandma drags her grandson along to the church: [the poster shows] a typical Grandma, a stupid kid, an old biddy losing her mind, trying to baptise the child' (in the baptism ritual lay the only link with

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<sup>1</sup> In terms of the decoration of classrooms, dormitories in orphanages, recreation halls, etc., this appears to be accurate, though children's institutions, including schools, did usually have churches or at least prayer-rooms attached to them before 1917. [Editor].

the place where these posters were hanging, as they aimed to convince visitors to children's clinics that baptism was unhygienic due to the abundance of microbes in holy water and so on) [*Moi put'* 2003: 96, 183].<sup>1</sup>

### 'Everyone knows there's no God'

Memoirs from the war and post-war periods show, on the one hand, an intensification of religious feeling in the childhood environment, and, on the other hand, a weakening within children's consciousness of religious attributes and confessionalism, and the dawning of visions of a world without religion:

*Aunt Nastya whispers away in her corner at the weekends, getting ready to go to church: 'So I've got this, and I've got my bag and I don't want to be late to church...God forgive us our sins...I've got to darn the stockings tomorrow, there's laundry to do tomorrow, but now I've got to get to church...I didn't want to wake them...well, all right then, I'm off to church...' And my dream, lulled by my aunt Nastya's soothing whisper, changes the word 'church' into a nicer idea: lucky aunt Nastya, every Sunday, she goes off to the circus...* [Smekhov 2001: 11-12].

By this time, the 'transfer of information' about faith from the older to the younger generations had become very difficult, especially in cities. Young people's environment and the space they inhabited were taking on an atheist character. Believers were becoming reclusive, and even if they prayed 'in sight of the whole family', then they didn't talk about their faith, didn't explain this to children, and so on. Children could only get a sideways glance at religion:

*Father had been in the Party since the start of the war, Aunt Nastya was praying to God, Mother was spending all week healing other people. Granddad Moisei (my father's father) had arrived from Gomel'. He's also praying-but in a different way from Nastia. But both inspire a sense of respect for the mystery of their faith and some kind of secret knowledge* [Smekhov 2001: 11-12].

Such a sense of respect was not universal, let alone any kind of deeper scrutiny. The danger of communicating about religion minimised the contact between grandchildren and old people:

<sup>1</sup> Against the background of 'silence about God' it is astonishing to record the existence of non-verbal behaviour in some families, persisting as a link between different generations as late as the 1970s. 'In my family it wasn't the thing to talk about God, to observe the fasts, to go to church, but there was a firm tradition of christening children and to celebrate church festivals as well as public holidays and special family days [e.g. birthdays]' [*Moi put'* 2003: 100]

*My parents were Party members and so we had had the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint drummed into us rather successfully. As a child, I didn't believe in God and it was funny to think that He existed. The only believer in our family was our grandmother. **She was sort of self-conscious about her beliefs, and never spoke of them** [my emphasis – VB], but we know that she kept an icon. We tried to convince her otherwise: 'Grandma, Gagarin has flown into space, and he didn't see God there.' 'God's invisible, children', she would reply' (Anna, b. 1952).*

It was no accident that this 'communications ban' on religion had come into being, and that it had such heavy official encouragement (more strongly at some points, more weakly at others). It was part of the official programme to instil atheism into the very setting where Soviet children were growing up. The absence of contacts with believers was supposed to demonstrate the progressive nature of atheist consciousness even to those children who could have started to have doubts:

*At school, it was explained to us that people had believed in Him by mistake, but now science had shown that He doesn't exist, and could not exist, even Jesus Christ had never existed – he had been made up. Unfortunately, I believed 'science', but for some reason I always envied those people from the past to whom science had not yet shown that God didn't exist. It seemed to me that life with faith was much better than materialism. But at the same time, I thought that in our times, there wasn't a single believer left, nor could there be. And actually, I never did meet a single one (MR, b. 1958).*

This situation was enforced by the official discourse of textbooks:

*All the textbooks declared that scientists had proved by their discoveries there was no God. It was only when I was quite elderly that I realised most of them were devout believers (Z. Yu., b. 1937; cf. [Moi put: 119]).*

All of this could, of course, lead to conflict with religious believers in the family, particularly grandmothers (and less often grandfathers). 'She tried to tell me, using every means at her disposal, about her ideas of God and religion', remembers a female respondent, born in 1947. This informant's grandmother, referred to here,

*was an uneducated woman, with very primitive ideas about religion, literally things like: God is the man on the icons, an old man with a beard, sitting up on a cloud. That was it. And when Gagarin flew into space, well at that moment, we all became atheists. We understood that that God that grandma had told us about, well, it turned out that he didn't exist. That's it. And so somehow, bit by bit, my attitude to religion became one of indifference' (Ibid.).*



A woman born in 1944 has similar memories:

*I didn't believe in either God or the devil, but Grandma was really religious, and we always used to argue with her about it, and I always 'beat' her. 'Where can your God be, if rockets are flying up there [into the cosmos]?' At that point, space travel hadn't in fact got that far, but it was just around the corner. And she would reply: 'Oh, oh, sinner, sinner! What are you saying? You can't say that!' At that time, the usual view was that people had dreamed up religion themselves and believed blindly. As for me, I thought that man ought to be immortal in any case. I didn't think Grandma's little God could possibly give anyone immortality. I was sure science and medicine would eventually invent some kind of elixir which would grant eternal youth.*

But there are, of course, also subliminally religious elements in the child's point of view here, too (religion is not powerful, not miraculous enough for the informant). And an equally important element of many stories about post-war childhood was the description of children's self-generated relationship with faith as an atheist atmosphere of 'sterile materialism'<sup>1</sup> took over the home. Many respondents and memoir-writers recount their 'spontaneous religiosity', not tied to one particular religion or even any religion at all, which emerged as if from a vacuum. Memoir-writers, such as Mark Lapitsky, born in 1941, point to the specific faith of children in the divine and the relative spontaneity of its emergence:

*As a child, I fervently prayed and prayed and when I was older too. But it was to my own God, since I had no idea at all about the existence of religion, Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, and other Gods worshiped by humans. I had my own personal God and I didn't need any other. I worshipped him, asked him for protection during all the events in my life and my parents' lives. I came up with a prayer myself, a naive, childish prayer. Over the course of many years, it remained unchanged, and I have not to this day changed a single word in it. Every single word of that prayer was sacred to me. The desire to pray, such as gripped me when I was a child, is a deeply intuitive, instinctive feeling. It was at that point that I understood that you can pray to whatever you want-to the door, the table, the nail or a book – and in that 'whatever' is God. During my childhood,*

<sup>1</sup> The politics of 'sterile materialism' (I cite the phrase from my informant V. I., born in 1966) was extended to entire cities in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The memory of religion and God was missing from people's relationships in itself. There wasn't a single working church in this entire city of 300,000 people', recalled V. I. of Kurgan, in Western Siberia. It is striking that such a situation could be typical not only of new Soviet towns, such as Bratsk, but of old towns and cities too – Kurgan was founded in the sixteenth century. [My own interviews in the old city of Ekaterinburg reveal a similar picture – Editor].

*I had my own God, no less important for me than God is for everyone else. I don't know, maybe after childhood he abandoned me, or maybe he grew up with me and is with me to this day. I'd like to think that this same childhood God is still with me. My religiosity, if one can call it that, was never confessional. It often seems to me that I can define my religion as a religion of childhood [Lapitsky 2001: 7]).*

Lapitsky's contemporary, one of my own interviewees, talks about this in a more artless style, saying:

*During childhood, I simply...simply believed in God. Of course in my family no-one knew about this, and it was not the done thing to talk about it, especially as my father worked for the powers that be... in the NKVD. It was simply a crime...in those times...that's the thing. But at school too, in the classroom, we were always discussing it (Valentina S., b. 1941).*

In respondents' stories one can also sense how unprepared were the Russian Orthodox Church, and other churches operating on the territory of the USSR, for these manifestations of spontaneous religiosity. The prolonged absence of religious education had led to a situation where churches could not cope with the lagging behind of religion in the dialogue with science and technology. The Russian Orthodox Church was, nevertheless, in an easier situation than other religions and confessions. Despite all the repressions, it remained more accessible than other churches and religions:

*In my family, there were no religious people – at least, I had never heard about them, and for that reason, I had no religious habits instilled in me as a child (this was the case for most of my contemporaries too). We lived in an atheist state and religion was far away, off the beaten track, and none of us pursued it. But once someone decided to pursue religion, then of course it would be the Russian Orthodox church they chose. Things were like that even in Muslim Tashkent. All the boys and girls around me (Russians, Jews, Armenians, even Uzbeks) had been to church at least a few times, had blessed the kulich for Easter and had traditional Easter meals and so on. But all this had been done secretly, hidden from the school authorities, with a little help from their parents. But the Jewish faith was much more remote, way off the map even [Zhurbin 2002: 27–31].*

There were instances of covert struggle with the system, a war waged on the basis of the parental or personal faith. Opposition to the post-war situation was strengthened by religious beliefs – by no means, incidentally, always Orthodox ones:

*Mother, being a believer, went to Ukraine a lot at that time [in the 1950s], and even now in Ukraine there are a lot of sects, all kinds of*

*Protestant, Catholic, and so on.<sup>1</sup> My mother was a Baptist and raised us on the scriptures. She was very patient with us. She was a class two invalid,<sup>2</sup> so she didn't work, as she couldn't walk. It was very hard for her to teach us, but she had always had an interest in education, knowledge, in striving toward something greater than ourselves (respondent b. 1946).*

All in all, there was a significant variety of types of inter-generational relationships to do with faith and the lack of it. The most widespread type of relationship between my respondents' Communist parents and their 'irrational' older relations was a neutral indifference, tinged with anxiety for their careers. This indifference to 'irrational relations'<sup>3</sup> was tolerated by the authorities as long as the believer didn't start to undertake any form of teaching to the younger generation:

*My parents were not believers. Father worked at the factory, mother was a medical attendant at the hospital. I grew up with my grandmother, she was a real believer. My grandma would always go to church holidays in the village of Tabora, because where we lived in Yugo-Kamsk there was no church at the time. My father was a Communist, but he did not prevent my grandmother believing. I remember that the kitchen was my grandma's 'diocese', as it were. There was an icon there... My grandma was the only one to observe the Lenten fast, but she didn't make us do the same (Nina, b. 1948).*

Another respondent of that same age is even more forthright:

*Until I was seven, our grandma lived with us, and we spent most of our time with her. But she wasn't allowed to influence us too much, because both our father and our grandfather were communists (Sergei, b. 1948).*

In both the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, the ideal family was one in which the child 'did not hear one word about faith or God in his entire childhood and youth' (V.I., b. 1966)

If the parents were inattentive, the school would step in to put things right, and a strict attitude could always be expected here.

<sup>1</sup> Sic. The reference to say Baptists and Catholics as 'sects' (where the correct Anglophone usage would be 'denominations') is derived from Soviet practice. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> i.e. severely disabled (class one, literally 'group one', includes the very severely disabled, and class three the mildly disabled). The level of state support received – the amount of free care, living allowance, and other benefits – depends on the classification. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> i.e. 'indifference' in the sense of failing to do anything to control the 'irrational' behaviour, passivity, which, according to a strict interpretation of Soviet tradition, would have been a misdemeanour ('non-denunciation' of relatives was a crime in the Stalin era, and in the post-Stalin era, conduct literature regularly warned citizens that ignoring anti-social behaviour had fatal consequences for the morality of society at large). [Editor].

*My grandma on my mother's side was a strong believer. I was christened and was myself a strong believer. But our school organised anti-religious lessons and as a result, as the years went by, before I reached twenty, I had already lost any emotional attachment to religion (Valentina, b. 1948).*

State and party organisations reinforced the work done by schools. The parent and teacher were jointly responsible for instilling atheism in the children they cared for. Christening ceremonies carried out by 'irrational' relatives could result in the severe rebukes levelled at the head of the family, even if that person had been away from home, on a business trip, when the ceremonies took place. This was particularly true for fathers and mothers holding high official positions, and indeed for Party members generally.

In non-Party families, it was easier, though the scrutiny directed at these was no less intense; but sometimes people in this category escaped being punished because there was not always an obvious punishment to hand,<sup>1</sup> or the powers that be 'didn't get to them' in the first place.

#### **'We went to church secretly'**

Deeply established family religious traditions played a role in preserving and reproducing religiosity, especially if these had been preserved due to communication behind the backs of the adult atheists engaged in public activities:

*My father was a technician, a non-believer. My mother ran a kindergarten, and was also a non-believer. But my grandmother, on the other hand, was a believer. Her father had been a priest, and her mother had come from a merchant background. There were always icons hanging in their houses. It was grandma who told me all about God, and everything to do with him, I was christened, also thanks to Grandma...grandma tried to teach me songs but I don't remember them...I remember that we went with grandma to a church across the wide Kama river. There was no bridge, and we went on a river tram-boat. My grandma was very smartly dressed. We stayed with relatives. I remember the morning service and the religious procession. On the way back, my grandma took me to a zoo. But all this only lasted while grandma was alive (Vladimir, b. 1948).*

For elder relatives who were believers in Soviet society, a lack of faith was not absolute or all-encompassing. Soviet pedagogues understood this well. Schools organised a special system of opposition to the

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<sup>1</sup> Party members whose children were baptised etc. could be expelled from the Party, a sanction obviously not available against non-members. [Editor].

influence of religious grandmothers. Usually, this system took the form of networks of atheist clubs and specialists in teaching methods who ran courses at schools, coordinating and perfecting the educational and propaganda work carried out there:

*When I, you know, lived in the country, when I was young, I remember being taught to pray. It was my grandma, and I have a hazy recollection: we're kneeling, there [in the country]. In the corner, there's an icon. And we were bowing down in front of something. I remember she taught me prayers too. You see. But that was when I was about five or six. After that I don't remember anything. But when I was at school I went to an atheist club. In general, they tried to get to the bottom of where religion was coming from and so on. You see. But in the village, like I said, grandma was a believer, though she never went to church. Because there was no church in the village and the nearest one was far away. But I don't know why she never went anywhere. But I remember a time when she prayed. But once I'd grown up, I don't recall that she prayed or stood before the icon. Somehow I don't remember that. And then, like I say, I became an atheist.*

The narrator of this reminiscence, Sergei V. (b. 1953) had perhaps himself simply stopped noticing his grandma's prayers – for him they were totally insignificant and he was no longer being asked to pray alongside her anyway, as was the case before. He had become such a confirmed atheist that when he started at the institute, he even took part in informal debates, on his own initiative, with a believer seminarian, sticking fast to what he'd learned at school.

Other respondents linked their own lack of religion with the absence of grandmothers and grandfathers at home, with the fact that they grew up with only mothers and fathers, who in their turn were fully in agreement with the school and the whole educational system, 'not welcoming' any manifestations of religiosity or even any talk of it outside the controlled space of the school or the atheist lecture in the Red Corner.<sup>1</sup>

Family practices of everyday religiosity, however, could turn out to be stronger than school indoctrination (and not only on the level of ritual, but also on the level of conscious attitudes to religious tradition). They acquired any forms which would ensure survival. For instance, use could be made of the linguistic advantages of special settlers:<sup>2</sup> outsiders

<sup>1</sup> Agitational centres attached to apartment blocks, or groups of apartment blocks. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> 'Special settlers' are members of groups subjected to forced resettlement as a political punishment, including so-called 'kulaks' (opponents of collectivisation), national minorities such as Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, and natives of the Baltic states, 'class outsiders' (i.e. descendants of gentry and rich industrialist families) in the 1930s, etc. Such settlers were usually deported long distance, to localities where their customs and languages were unknown. [Editor].

simply noticed grandchildren being taught texts of some kind in a language unknown locally, when these were in fact prayers. Other similar strategies could be used to conceal from the beady eyes of vigilant Soviet citizens the preparations for religious holidays, which symbolically linked all generations of one family within the space of an unofficial ritual.<sup>1</sup>

The cultural topography of many Russian villages was particularly complicated, divided as it was into atheist and non-atheist sections of the population, with every other villager (literally) espousing opposite points of view. This situation persisted into the Brezhnev era, as a woman born in 1971 recalled. Her own grandmother used to send her off with the text of a prayer that she had written out to help this or that person in need, and give her strict instructions about which way to go to find that particular individual, which houses and people she should avoid, what to say if so-and-so stopped her and asked her where she was going. She was also told that on no account should she show anyone what she had hidden in her palm.

Of course, there were not very many cultural spaces where strategies of evasion could be practised: families, villages, or individual apartments constituted the exceptions. Much larger was the space of silence: even when at home, people didn't talk 'about that'. A typical story runs thus: someone would be christened but would never go to church, and there was no talk about religion at all: 'Our attention wasn't drawn to it' (Galina, b. 1950). In urban settings, such silence was more common than it was in villages: 'Faith in God was replaced in our family by faith in knowledge, which was considered the main value in human life, and it was to this we had to strive for' (Nina, b. 1951). There emerged a polarity in the ideas and values of people, an opposition between 'religious' and 'enlightened'. In the everyday discourse of both city-dwellers and country-dwellers (but earlier among the former), the idea of an 'intelligentsia family' came to mean an 'non-religious family':

*In early childhood, I absolutely didn't know a thing about faith in God. Because I came from an intelligentsia family. At that time,*

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<sup>1</sup> On comparing the materials I collected with the material in [Fletcher 1981] about the persistence of christening in the Soviet Union (even atheists often carried this ritual out), and also of marriage and funerals, we can hazard a guess that it was precisely the persistence of religious consciousness at the level of ritual rather than the transmission of belief as such that allowed it to survive in the atheist state. Fletcher writes that there were always more people in Soviet society who had been christened than ones who had not. If it was typical, in the Soviet period, for grandmothers and grandfathers to get children christened while parents either opposed this or did not encourage it, in the post-Soviet period, on the other hand, it has become typical for parents themselves to get children christened, now against a background of passivity or hostility from the atheist grandparents (see the evidence produced by Fran Markowitz in [Markowitz 2000: 190]).

*there was no faith, no God. And in our family there was no particular attitude to it, well, we just didn't believe in God. At that time, people from the intelligentsia, teachers say, simply didn't believe in God* (Olga, b. 1952).

Often parents would especially emphasise to their children that the family had atheist values, so as to protect their children and themselves from having information about them accidentally transmitted to the 'powers that be'. A female respondent, born 1952, recalled that she first found out about the existence of God when her parents tried to hide from her the fact that they were going out to christen a neighbour's son. Thus, school and state strove in unison in 1940s, and also in the 1950s and 1960s, to assert the primacy of a secular, ideologically regulated form of knowledge over all other forms of inner life, and this kind of attitude quickly penetrated into the family: 'Belief in God was replaced in our family by belief in the power of knowledge, which was considered the main value in life, which we were all supposed to strive for' (Nina, b. 1951).

Yet religious feelings still persisted in some places. Besides everyday family intergenerational practices, habitual rituals and so on, something else that sustained these was the inexhaustible and all-encompassing nature of the child's faith, the tendency for the child to 'spiritualise' the world. This 'child's consciousness' was not destroyed by any news about people flying into space:

*But I had always, I think, known about God, had related to him in my own way. And when my old, toothless granny shook her wizened old fist at every plane or helicopter flying past (at that time there were not so many of them flying around), she would say, 'oh you antichrists, why have you flown up to God?' – I was surprised and thought, why, they couldn't fly up to God, because well, he's all around, and I couldn't understand why she didn't know that* (Natalia, b. 1951)

Children could experience true grief or emotional discomfort when parents actually managed to convince or convert them, instilling in them the thought that God didn't exist, that there was no 'other world' and so on – that is, destroying their mystical attitude to the surrounding world.

Thus, for the Soviet world on the threshold of the 1960s, the desired formula was one which had first come into existence in the 1930s: 'Everyone knows that God doesn't exist'. But the Soviet child had his own answer to that: 'God exists, but I don't believe in him'. This formula helped him and his faith to survive all of the subsequent waves of state militant atheism. The child would close himself off, or rather, would shut inside himself any kind of religious feeling,



keeping it away from the prying eyes of adults, and these feelings were often not formally religious, although they often relied on contact with the objects of a particular religion which had not entirely disappeared from the everyday surroundings of the child, usually growing up in an atheist family which was nonetheless largely tolerant of other's choices of faith. The memoirs of Natalia Sh. (born 1951), who spent her childhood in Moscow province, are illuminating:

*And behind the stove, there was an icon painted on a panel, darkened by the years, which I really loved. I would spend ages stroking the painted faces of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Sadly, when we moved to a new flat, we must have left it behind. I remember that at kindergarten during lunch I swallowed a prune stone. For some reason this really scared me and during the whole of the 'rest hour', I prayed to God that everything would turn out all right. To pray to God, I chose the right corner under the ceiling, and in that place, there appeared a white circle with a cross in the middle, shining with an inner light. So I literally received a positive response to my request. From that time onwards, if I ever had to address God, I tried the same thing, and when I got a positive reply, I saw in that shining circle a cross, and at other times, just a (minus) sign.*

The grown-ups had no idea about the child's mental reconstruction of the iconostasis in their icon corner, about the inner religious feeling which stayed with this woman throughout her entire life. Thus, a child's independent sense of faith could become a source of support for the future faith of the adult in the godless world of Soviet Russia. It was precisely those whose childhoods had fallen in the period from the 1950s to the start of the 1970s, who became the leading figures in the post-Soviet period.

### **'No-one mentioned any kind of religious feeling'**

Children's faith continued to live on throughout the whole of the Soviet era, despite the fact that an adult, if he believed, was banned by the full force of the state's machinery from talking with children about religious topics (or in large part thanks to this situation, because the 'vacuum' of the soul had by its very nature to be filled by something). Amongst the memoirs of childhood from people of very different generations, one frequently encounters phrases such as: 'I wasn't encouraged to do it (going to church, prayers, reading the bible, conversations about religion etc), as at that time, it wasn't the done thing (it was forbidden, it was not welcomed, it was fraught with the danger of losing one's career, income etc)'.

If a person (grandmother, mother etc) was a believer, this ban on associating with children was particularly onerous. They were forced to renounce religious upbringing for their children, just as in Orwell's *1984*, people were instructed to renounce their loved ones. The demands to renounce like-mindedness with children (grandchildren) essentially meant renouncing the succession of generations. People went along with it so as to survive, so that their children wouldn't be affected (for what if they were suddenly to blurt something out?), so as not to ruin adults' careers, so as to let everyone live calmly (in the midst of other misfortunes and problems, this 'internal' problem did not seem very important, but it nonetheless affected everyone, especially believers). Atheist policies made it increasingly likely that believers would completely lose the souls of their children, who had already become bearers of other worldviews (after all, had it not been childhood atheism which had led many in the 1930s-1970s to lose the feeling of religious identity?). One can hypothesise that it was precisely for that reason that one so often encounters 'underground activity' by grandmothers towards their grandchildren: christenings, dragging them off to church with them, teaching of prayers etc. Equally, one can assume that grandmothers were spurred into action (often unconsciously) by the danger that society would completely lose all traditional religion. Also, in the end they didn't really have much to lose.

Thus grandmothers helped children's faith to survive, and children's faith then became a wellspring of the later religious renaissance, where adult people expressed a stubborn sense of self-assertion of the kind children do when they are caught up in something. It is this stubbornness which also characterises many more recent attempts to resurrect plans for religious socialisation and the teaching of religion in schools, along the lines of practices before 1917.

But there is another general aspect of this theme, in many ways opposite to the above. The indifference to religion of the 'mothers and fathers' generations testifies not only to their callousness. It also testifies to the very serious crisis in attitudes to the church and faith that had begun before the revolution, and which was linked with critical attitudes to the symbiosis of church and autocracy, to the conservatism of church educational policy, and also to the collapse of the social links which the maligned Church strove to uphold. It is for this reason that we often encounter in memoirs such phrases as: 'My parents worked in the factory, Father as a welder and Mother as a technician. Our grandmother was the only believer in the family', which also indicate a profound indifference to, a lack of trust in, religion, a conflation of belief and the official Orthodox faith. People were in no rush to die, suffer, or fight for their faith. Some parents believed in the still undiscredited ideals of communism and instilled

that faith in their children; some were doing very nicely without religion, thank you very much; some had such difficult lives that religion seemed irrelevant. To accept official atheism was often the easy way out. In the short term, at least.

***‘Turning Karla-Marla into the Holy Mother of God’:<sup>1</sup>*  
religious socialisation in post-Soviet Russia**

During the whole second half of the 1980s and the very beginning of the 1990s, serious changes overtook the patterns of religious socialisation. As a result of the increasing flabbiness of the anti-religious policies of the previous five years, a kaleidoscope of new spiritual orientations emerged, and it is hard for retrospective analysis to establish exactly which beliefs people were abandoning at one or another moment and where it was that they wanted to get to: from atheism to religion, or from one ‘new religious movement’ to another, or from occultism to traditional religion. The late Brezhnev era saw a flourishing of interest in occult sciences, especially in cities. Yoga and ‘everything to do with the East’, bioenergetics, dowsing, astrology, parapsychology, Chinese medicine, UFO sightings, and other such fads became oppositional cults to the state’s atheism. The 1980s were dominated by such searches – which, one should be clear, only affected older children, teenagers.<sup>2</sup> This was encouraged by the new tendency among some pedagogues to emphasise the positive role that religion could play in education. For instance, *The Concepts of Educating Young People in Modern Society*, published in 1991, asserted that ‘it is pedagogically justified to include religion in the curriculum, as a phenomenon of social culture and a focus for human moral values’ [Novikova 1991: 125].

In addition, the missionary and educational activities of Western Christian churches, especially Protestant ones (including both

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<sup>1</sup> I have adapted here a saying current in the 1930s and referring to the practice in villages, if one’s house was likely to be visited by outsiders, of hanging portraits of Karl Marx and other Communist leaders in the icon corner, and then replacing these with icons of the Mother of God at night. This covert practice inspired the code phrase, ‘turning Karla-Marla into the Holy Mother of God’ (as I was informed by a woman born in 1939).

<sup>2</sup> It should also be noted that the situation in villages was different and would require separate investigation. I will give only one example here. Evgeniya K., born 1954, observed, ‘I knew about Him. Lyuba’s granny had read us the Bible. I knew all about God. Not that I really believed in him, though, as a child. And we didn’t much like it when they wouldn’t let us go to the dances in the club because a church holiday was coming up. But now I’m a real believer.’ In response to a question about how religion was regarded in the family generally, she answered, ‘Ma and Pa believed, we had icons at home, but they didn’t keep the fasts, because they had tough jobs. Gran did though. And my friend’s gran too, she lived with the family and they’d all keep the fasts, her gran made all the proper food and that, only Lyuba’d come and eat in our house when they were all fasting.’

old denominations, with traditional roots in Russian territory, and relatively new ones), exercised a major influence on children at the start of the 1990s. By the end of the 1990s, there was a significant increase not only in the overall number of young believers (this was coming to constitute a largely proportion of the believer population than elderly believers did), but also in the proportion of young people believing in Christ but claiming not to be Orthodox.

Yet data about the modern Russian family which we collected in 2002–2003 from a survey of families of students in four Russian cities (Tambov, Moscow, Samara, Ekaterinburg) indicate that the links between generations have not been entirely restored, and point to an ideological war of intolerance between one generation and another, in the context of the preservation of the patriarchal-authoritarian model. On the one hand, we have broken intergenerational links, and on the other, we have intra-family traditional authoritarianism and patriarchy. Their combination yields unique insights into a society ripped apart by conflicts and aggression. The Russian family is still not a source of authority for children in questions of faith, but it is still fully an authority of ‘faithlessness’, lack of faith in oneself, in one’s nearest and dearest, in God, inasmuch as it fails to provide children with perspectives, orientations, values and possibilities etc.

In contemporary Russian reality, ‘with the loss of the institutions of traditional reproduction of religiosity from childhood onwards, and the early stages of socialisation, such as religious family, the system of religious academic institutions, the mechanism of production of religiosity, has been turned upside down’ [Pankov, Podshivalkina 1995: 100], society has entered a pre-figurative stage (to borrow the term used by Margaret Mead). Now it is not a question of older people teaching the young about religion, but of young people acquiring faith by uniting their own childhood religiosity with the religious freedoms in society as a whole. And such young people turn out to be more religiously developed than members of the previous generation. Westerners socialised in religious families often say later that their religious preferences were more a matter of ‘fate’ than ‘resolve’, a consequence of the reflexive reception of ideas literally drunk in with the mother’s milk. The outcome is often the renunciation of religion. In Russian families, by contrast, right up until the most recent times, turning to religion was still a matter of ‘resolve’, often taken in the context of an active intergenerational confessional conflict and a war between secular and orthodox ideologies in the schoolroom. In modern Russian society, atheist by origin, religious (or atheist) socialisation often takes place in the teeth of opposition (in whichever direction) from the family. The

principle of solidarity between generations based on a religious idea is only just starting to emerge. Schools have not yet learned to support it, worried that they might lose their important strategic position *between* parents and children. For this reason, the post-Soviet educational system has not got beyond the so called 'inversion of Karla-Marla into the Holy Mother of God', that is, the exchange of formal dogmatic and tyrannical atheism for a similar Orthodox fundamentalism, as expressed in the movement seeking to erase the boundaries between secular schools and the church. However, the religiosity of young people is already completely different. It is at the heart of this contradiction, between the liberalism of youth, the Orthodoxy of the middle aged, and the atheism of the elder generations, that the current religious socialisation of post-Soviet Russia is taking place. The central question now is how the current generation of young adults will raise their children.

### Conclusion

Having looked at the history of Soviet and post-Soviet childhood, we have seen that studying impressions of childhood in each period can play a significant role in the reconstruction of the whole religious side of the history of the educational system at a given point, in the understanding of the ways in which believers and non-believers come to their views, and in identifying the paradigms of their relationships with other believers, with churches, and with the state. Having got to know the child a little better from within, having understood what was going on in his soul at particular points, how he understood God and how he related to Him, we can confidently reconstruct the interactions between the adult world, and the child's world and appreciate the variety of paths to religious socialisation. It remains to be seen how much pressure there will now be from the adult world to abolish religious socialisation, or alternatively, to what extent religious socialisation can survive, and, in some senses, save the adult world from itself.

The advent of the Soviet regime heralded the continuation of many tendencies in the development of the religiosity of the 1910s, and the liquidation of many others. The following decades witnessed not just increasing atheism, but also the survival of faith on account of the preservation of traditional religious rituals in everyday life, and of the spontaneous religious socialisation of children as a result of the breakdown in communications between generations with regard to religion. The child's world and the faith of children turned out to be of great significance for the adult world and for the religious world-view of adults. Not only did adults recite the catechism to children: children also acted as the fathers of faith for adults during the twentieth century.

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*Translated by Polly Jones*