

The authorities reacted strongly to Father Dmitri Dudko's talks. Did they in fact see in them a real threat to the ruling materialistic and atheist ideology? I doubt it because the authorities' pretended ideological purism disappeared long ago. The authorities in fact fear the *ethical and social reformism* of his talks because their own atheistic State, built initially on the basis of *materialistic idealism* (called "Dialectical Materialism") was changed almost immediately into a stronghold of social conservatism and political pragmatism.

But Father Dmitri Dudko is not a political reformer. He is a good priest, and so cannot help acting, speaking and even thinking in the spirit of a new religious situation. For example, one of his parishioners said to him: "You are too rigid and strict Father Dmitri. If you go on like this, people will stop listening to you. Remember, we live in the twentieth century and some concessions are needed." But Father Dmitri objected: "We are afraid of austerity, of a hard life. We consider an easy life to be the height of blessedness. But let us be, as they say, more critical towards ourselves. We have already made concessions, we have broken with the Church. As a result there is crime, corruption, libertinism, dissatisfaction with life, the disintegration of family relationships. No, in order to restore all this, we must become ascetic. . . . Step by step we shall come to an ascetic consciousness in all things." (pp. 121-122). Such a conclusion is not unexpected.

Much has changed since the end of the nineteenth century when Vladimir Solovev blamed Tolstoy's moralism for not being *truly* Christian. Now Father Dmitri accuses the atheistic state of immorality, which prevents it being Christian. Yet it can never become moral until it ceases being atheistic: ". . . we cannot continue to live like this. There is not only no conscience left in us, but not even honesty. We have lost the capacity to distinguish not only between good and evil but also between decency and indecency." (p. 130). This is a warning, not a condemnation. It is a true statement about the situation as it is and will continue to be unless Russia turns to its Hope – Christianity.

ALEXANDER PYATIGORSKY

## Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union

by David E. Powell

MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1975, 206 pp., £13.75.

In a totalitarian State, a propaganda campaign can be conducted in many areas of public life simultaneously. Dr. Powell's examination of Soviet atheist propaganda analyses its techniques and effectiveness in each area. He considers first the disseminating of anti-religious ideas by atheist

clubs and societies and then evaluates Soviet efforts to educate citizens in atheism from their childhood, both in school and for example by means of organized excursions from village, school and factory to local museums of atheism. Then Dr. Powell assesses the Party's attempts to institute secular festivals to replace religious festivals. The Party has also tried to persuade people to use Soviet ceremonies for private occasions such as marriage, baptism and burial. Of these, only the secularized marriage ceremony has become fairly popular. But because the Party feels the need to make all ceremonies into lessons in social awareness, even private celebrations are depersonalized, conducted in public, and frequently transformed into "an offensive charade".

The task of converting people falls to the mass media. The press is openly committed to active atheist work. The cinema is traditionally the leading medium for atheist propaganda. But until recently atheist films have missed their target because, by concentrating on caricatured excesses of clerical depravity and hypocrisy, they have left untouched the faith of the average believer. For some unknown reason television and radio are not much used in the fight against religion.

Dr. Powell deals finally with the various forms of verbal contact between atheists and believers. He discusses the use of public debates and lectures, but concludes that their effectiveness is minimal, chiefly because convinced believers simply do not attend them. He then turns to atheist work with individuals: atheists befriend believers and attempt to "enlighten" them. Such work usually fails because of a misconception held by many atheists: believers are seen officially as lonely people who are unsure of themselves and anxious to unburden themselves to a sympathetic comrade. The truth is often a shock to atheist zealots.

The text is well-researched. It includes extensive footnotes and a bibliography. But the book is too short for the vast subject of Soviet anti-religious activity. So it is no more than a general introduction to the subject. It opens, moreover, with an extensive survey of the history and vicissitudes of religion in the Soviet Union which is necessarily sketchy and drawn largely from readily available secondary sources. As the author himself correctly remarks, "much of the story is too familiar to bear repeating here". Yet the repetition of the story occupies a quarter of the book. Some of the statistical evidence used to support the author's contentions is unconvincing. One table purporting to demonstrate a decline in the observance of religious ceremonies over the years in fact does no such thing, not even the reverse. Much of the text and all the clearly drawn and interesting maps have already been published elsewhere; and although clear and easy to read, the text is leisurely, verbose and often repetitious.

This said, the book contains interesting facts and well-documented observations, from which the author draws interesting conclusions.

Atheist propaganda, Dr. Powell believes, is misconceived, misdirected and ineffective. But in order to retain credibility as a revolutionary organization the Party must be seen to be actively engaging with an enemy. To feed the myth of revolution is especially necessary in these days of post-Khrushchev stagnation and post-Stalin ideological disillusionment. Nevertheless, success in the ideological battle has eluded the atheists. A factor which has contributed to this failure, according to Dr. Powell, is the lack of Bibles and other religious texts in the USSR. As these are virtually unobtainable atheist agitators can never acquire a true understanding of their enemy. They rely on second-hand prejudiced notions and propaganda slogans. True believers remain untouched by their arguments.

PHILIP WALTERS

### The Spiritual Basis of Solzhenitsyn's Creative Work (*Dukhovnye Osnovy Tvorchestva Solzhenitsyna*)

by Tatyana Lopukhina-Rodzyanko, Posev 1974, 178 pp., No price.

### Solzhenitsyn's Religion

by Niels C. Nielsen Jr., Mowbrays, 1976, 164 pp., £4.95.

*The Spiritual Basis of Solzhenitsyn's Creative Work* is a promising subject for a book, and it will be useful to those who read Russian, but it is not likely to be translated. In modern Russian the word "spiritual" has a wider meaning than our "spirituality" and connotes morality, aesthetics and almost all intellectual effort, as well as religion. So this book is primarily about Solzhenitsyn's ethical assumptions. His concept of the *pravednik* – the just man or woman, such as Matryona – by whom a village, a country and the world itself stand, is analysed by reference to a number of characters in Solzhenitsyn's books. This is interesting and it leads naturally to a similar analysis of how he understands conscience – for which it is better to die than to lose. Finally, why do some people lose their consciences when put to the test, while other people's consciences survive every ordeal of life in concentration camps?

The *pravednik* and his or her conscience always depend on religious tradition and in Solzhenitsyn this is often a specifically religious tradition. Alyosha, the Baptist in *Ivan Denisovich*, is a central figure in this analysis, but otherwise religion plays a surprisingly small part in this book, sensitive and perceptive as it is. I should have liked, for instance, a consideration of General Samsonov's agony of prayer in *August 1914*.

See more of Godless Utopia: Soviet Anti-Religious Propaganda on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of Godless Utopia: Soviet Anti-Religious Propaganda on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account? One example is the return of Anatoly Kashpirovsky, a self-styled psychic healer who enjoyed popularity in the late 80s and is back on YouTube offering guidance as the coronavirus spreads.