

Letters from Ukraine. Prohibited Easter and tribunal against God

May 09, 2024

Hi!

I promised this letter, and I want to write it because the topic is fascinating. I will tell you what the Soviets did to prevent people from celebrating Easter. But while researching the subject, I read a lot of different information about religion in the Soviet Union. Yes, they considered it the 'opium for the people' and did their best to eradicate it from their lives.

In 1918, following the Russian revolution in which the Bolsheviks overthrew (killed) the Russian tsar, an unexpected tribunal was held in which God was put on trial. The People's Commissar of Education Anatoly Lunacharsky, one of Lenin's closest associates, invented another format of anti-religious propaganda: on January 16, 1918, a tribunal was organized in Moscow to judge God for his 'crimes against humanity and mass genocide'.

The Bolsheviks tried to observe all procedural details: there were judges, prosecutors, and witnesses, and the 'accused' was provided with lawyers. There was a Bible in the courtroom, and the victim was the Russian people, who personified the entire human race. And, of course, the room was packed with an audience.

The debate lasted about five hours. Prosecutors presented evidence of guilt based on historical events. The state's lawyers argued that their client suffers from severe dementia and psychological disorders and, therefore, is not responsible for the actions of which he is accused.

As a result, the court found the defendant guilty, and the chairman of the trial, Lunacharsky, read out the verdict: 'God is sentenced to death and is to be executed the following morning. Until then, his lawyers have no right to appeal or request any delay.' At dawn the next day, the firing squad carried out the sentence by firing several shots into the sky over Moscow.

Now you know the name of the man who executed God.

And now, let's go back to Easter. Easter is the most popular Christian holiday, and the widespread blessing of Easter baskets in churches openly irritated the atheist Soviet authorities. I will give a few examples of what they did to prevent Ukrainians from celebrating this holiday. I read about it and asked my mom and aunt whether it was like that, and they confirmed it.

Replacing and 'exposing' the holiday

An effective tool for more actively eradicating Easter traditions was timing the Easter holiday to coincide with the spring festivals. Sports games, lotteries, amateur performances, film screenings, etc., were organized.

Another method often used by the communists to distract people from the celebration was to give lectures and show films that revealed the 'true essence' of the holiday.

Preventing the preparation and celebration of Easter

The organization of so-called spring 'Subotnik' (arranged on Saturday) and even 'Nedilnyk' (arranged on Sunday) clean-ups became a mass phenomenon in the Soviet era. They almost always coincided with the Easter holidays, and no one even tried to hide the fact that they were done on purpose. People planted trees, bushes, and flowers and cleaned collective farms and schoolyards. It is clear that the main purpose of the communist party was to prevent people from preparing for Easter or from celebrating it at all.

Loss of pioneer* dignity

**Pioneers was a Soviet Union compulsory youth organization for children ages 9–14 that existed between 1922 and 1991.*

Anyone who dared to go to celebrate Easter was severely judged. This was especially true of pupils because those seen at the Easter service were publicly shamed at general meetings and in the wall newspapers.

It was common practice to set up special commissions to ensure pupils did not attend church on Easter. Teachers took turns keeping watch outside the churches.

The most zealous teachers at the school even examined the hands of children, especially girls, to see if they had traces of paint from Easter eggs and scolded them for losing their pioneer dignity.

Loss of job

Only people of respectable age who were no longer employed could freely attend church and bless Easter baskets without fear of any sanctions. Representatives of working professions and collective farmers were not explicitly prohibited from doing so. But if any professional worker, let's call them white-collar (teacher, government official, doctor, etc.) decided to consecrate Easter cake, they faced immediate dismissal.

Closed churches

A significant obstacle to consecrating the Easter basket was that most churches were closed. Only in some villages did religious buildings remain in use.

Later, during Gorbachev's perestroika and some liberalization of religion, priests came to villages where religious buildings were not used for their intended purpose or were eradicated and blessed Easter baskets in the villagers' homes. Sometimes, this ceremony was performed at the cemetery.

Prohibition to visit the cemetery to honour the dead

To suppress the religious habits associated with commemorating the dead at Easter, it was also forbidden to visit the graves of deceased relatives a week after Easter (an old tradition

here), so people secretly went to cemeteries to place Easter eggs on their relatives' graves.

Instead, party officials organized public memorial services and funeral rallies at cemeteries on May 9 (Victory Day in the Soviet Union and still in russia), trying to turn these dates into days of remembrance not only for soldiers but for all the dead.

Sincerely,
Yaroslava

P.S. Yes-yes, you can share the letter with anyone you want.