



The Heavenly Tsars

Dmitri Moor

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The poster was published in the newspaper *Bezbozhnik*. It can be divided into three different parts: The bottom shows Christian churches, a synagogue, a mosque, and a Buddhist temple, representing the earthly sphere. All the towers are crooked. In the middle part staggered demons and an outraged archangel Gabriel are shown on clouds. This placement of an angel and some demons between the earth and gods suggests an understanding of creatures that are neither purely godly, nor purely earthly, but dwell in between both spheres. The upper part of the poster symbolizes the divine realm, where deities from monotheistic as well as pagan religions dine together.

The items on the dining table deliver an anti-religious message. There is wine and a pig in front of the Jewish god and Muhammed mocking religious dietary rules. Looking further to the right, the black figure is served a smaller version of himself on a silver platter.

The Soviet Union, founded in 1922, completed the abolishment of tsarism in Russia. For this regime, religion was as a leftover of the "old world" that needed to be eradicated. Since the earthly monarchist was defeated by the Bolshevik movement, the heavenly rulers can be brought down as well. In lining up all the different deities together, the poster is sending the message that all religions and gods were expressions of weakness and irrationality.

In this poster, a certain amount of religious literacy of the viewer is presumed. A variety of religions seems to be still known at this time. The viewer is expected of being able to identify the black figure as a display of pagan religion and to be familiar with the sight of a Buddhist temple. Christianity in its various forms was still anchored in Russia in the early 20s as well. People needed to be familiar with the dietary laws of Judaism and Islam to understand the mockery going on at the dining table. The portrayal of a satanic "heavenly secretary" is another factor that adds to the anti-religious message of the poster.

This poster stands out through its details and thorough understanding of various religious traditions. Moor's mockery assumes a deeper knowledge of religious laws and the variety of gods and demons within religions. In later posters the religious diversity disappears and is replaced by simpler representations. This development can be traced back to the persecutions under Stalin and the following exclusion of religion from the public. As a result, the religious literacy of the average person, for whom the posters were designed, declined.