



## Down with the clergy and miracle healers!

anon.

ca. 1930s



In the Soviet Union, peasants were classified as especially backwards and susceptible to religion. That is why, from the late 1920s onwards, they were identified as an especially important target group for antireligious propaganda. This poster is a very good example for the Soviet attempts to educate the rural population. It contrasts magical religion and scientific veterinary medicine by explicitly demonstrating that only the latter can ensure the wellbeing of livestock. By acknowledging one of the functions that was ascribed to religious or magical rituals by the rural population, and

thereby establishing a link to the peasants' *Lebenswelt*, this poster could be considered to be especially accessible. The style of the poster, with the contrasting panels showing a "before" and an "after", connects it to the tradition of *lubki* (popular prints). Producers of Soviet political art theorized that while city posters had to be eye-catching and immediately comprehensible, peasants would prefer to examine a poster in all its particulars and find the *lubok* easiest to understand.

Drawing on several prominent themes of Soviet antireligious propaganda, both the pictures and the texts point out that religious rituals were futile – or even harmful. Indeed, the only ones who profit from these actions, as the texts say, are the religious agents, who exploit the peasants' ignorance for their own gain. This religious approach is contrasted with the scientific approach, where the livestock is shown to be healthy and thriving, while the animals were looking sick and underfed under the care of the religious agents. The second set of pictures, showing animals that died as a result of the peasants' reliance on religion, expands the poster's educative aim from just antireligious matters to also hygienic matters: the uneducated peasants' careless handling of animal carcasses leads to the spread of diseases, which damages the national economy; the text gives instructions on how to correctly bury the bodies of deceased livestock.

Peasants are called to change their behaviour and renounce religion both by scolding and rational reasoning. Their supposed ignorance and lack of education is admonished several times, while science is shown to simply achieve better results than religion in the pursuit of certain goals. Scientific atheists believed that science and technology would destroy the validity of religion and refute the religious worldview of the population, because they demonstrated that "miracles" could be achieved that are not caused by a god.

While the peasants on the poster are depicted as originally ignorant, as they believe in the efficacy of rituals and let themselves be exploited by religious agents, the poster also attributes them the capability of leaving religion behind. This duality can be connected to the different ways peasants was perceived by the Russian intelligentsia.

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