

“Did Stalin Have a Deathbed Conversion? What About Trotsky?”

I am trying to check the validity of the following material. I came across one of your articles on the Web and thought you may be able to comment. I am not expecting you to research this, but just if you happen to know would you mind responding? It would be a help.

Question 1. The statement “Religion is a crutch for the weak. . .” and various variants of it I had heard attributed to Joseph Stalin. Do you know if this is correct. Or was it Marx? I know Marx penned the famous “Religion is the opiate of the masses,” but who is generally attributed as the author of the first quote. Possibly it was just a common atheist saying and thus picked up by most of the communists.

Question 2. I recall hearing it said that Stalin close to his death had said, “I cannot escape the overwhelming feeling that I am about to be cast into an ocean of the blood of the lives I have destroyed,” or words to this effect. Do you know whether this is correctly attributed to Stalin, or was it another?

Question 3. I also recall reading somewhere that one of the old communists (again I thought it was Stalin) was the son of a Jewish father who upon moving to a new city changed to attending the Lutheran church, telling his son it was better for business. This contributed to the son rejecting God and adopting a strongly atheistic world view.

I am afraid I can't help you from my memory on these quotes. On #1, I know that Stalin attended an Orthodox Christian

School for ten years. He was kicked out of seminary for his radical Marxist views. I checked the *Oxford Book of Quotations*, but found nothing there. I have heard the quote about religion being a “crutch” mentioned many times, but I have never related this to Stalin.

On Questions #2 let me offer the following: I am not inclined to think Stalin made this statement of regret. I found these words about Stalin’s deathbed scene, as described by his daughter, Svetlana, in Allen Bullock’s *Hitler and Stalin*. She says:

“The death agony was terrible. God grants an easy death only to the just. He literally choked to death as we watched. At what seemed like the very last moment he suddenly opened his eyes and cast a glance over everyone in the room. It was a terrible glance, insane or perhaps angry and full of fear of death. . . Then something incomprehensible and terrible happened that to this day I can’t forget. . . He suddenly lifted his left hand as though he were pointing to something up above and bring down a curse on us all. The gesture was incomprehensible and full of menace. . . The next moment, after a final effort, the spirit wrenched itself free of the flesh.”

Bullock immediately adds,

“Like Hitler, Stalin preserved his image of himself intact to the end, without retraction or regret. Both men died defying their enemies.” (pg. 968).

With regard to #3, my first guess would be Trotsky. He was the son of a Russian Jew who settled in Ukraine, and there Trotsky was educated (Odessa on the Black Sea). His real name was Lev Bronstein. He took the name “Trotsky” at a time when he needed a forged passport to continue his underground activities undetected. I would start looking at his life first.

Hope this helps.

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