Faith Under Pressure

State-mandated atheism in the Soviet Union

TOT.C.8.2.D "state-mandated atheism, including the persecution of priests and religious believers"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two government actions that promoted atheism, circle one consequence for clergy, and box one consequence for other believers.

When the State Discouraged Worship

1 In the Soviet Union, leaders promoted atheism as part of Communist rule. A 1918 decree separated religious organizations from the state and schools, and declared their property public property. Officials later supported campaigns that taught atheism and discouraged worship. This was more than a leader's personal disbelief: the government used laws, schools, and public campaigns to reshape religious life. Yet Soviet policy changed over time, and some people continued to practice their faith.

2 The Russian Orthodox Church faced especially harsh pressure. In 1922, Soviet authorities seized church valuables, saying the proceeds would help people suffering from famine. Some clergy who resisted were arrested, and some were executed. During the 1930s, authorities shut many churches and sent thousands of priests and other clergy to prisons or labor camps. These actions targeted religious leaders as well as church buildings, making organized worship difficult in many communities.

3 Ordinary believers also faced danger. Some were arrested for holding religious meetings or teaching faith to children. Soviet campaigns targeted other faiths too, including Muslim and Jewish communities; places of worship were closed, and religious leaders were punished. Soviet law formally promised freedom of worship, but officials often restricted it in practice. Families sometimes prayed quietly at home rather than risk public attention. Their choices show how state pressure could reach beyond clergy into everyday life.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What makes the atheism described here a government policy rather than a personal belief?

2. How did Soviet authorities persecute priests and other clergy in the 1920s or 1930s?

3. How could state pressure affect a believer who was not a religious leader?

4. What difference does the passage show between Soviet law's promise and the experience of religious communities?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label for an imagined locked worship hall in the 1930s Soviet Union. Explain why it was locked, and show how state-mandated atheism affected both a religious leader and an ordinary believer without suggesting that all worship stopped.

ANSWER KEY

Faith Under Pressure

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.8.2.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two government actions that promoted atheism, circle one consequence for clergy, and box one consequence for other believers. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What makes the atheism described here a government policy rather than a personal belief?	**The government used laws, schools, and public campaigns to discourage worship and promote atheism.**
2	How did Soviet authorities persecute priests and other clergy in the 1920s or 1930s?	**Authorities arrested some clergy who resisted the 1922 seizure of church valuables and sent thousands of clergy to prisons or labor camps in the 1930s.**
3	How could state pressure affect a believer who was not a religious leader?	**A believer could be arrested for holding a religious meeting or teaching faith to children, or could feel compelled to pray quietly at home.**
4	What difference does the passage show between Soviet law's promise and the experience of religious communities?	**Although Soviet law promised freedom of worship, officials closed places of worship and punished religious leaders and believers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This locked door stands for the many Soviet places of worship closed during the 1930s. Government campaigns promoted atheism and made it hard for communities to gather openly. A priest might be sent to a labor camp, while a believer might pray quietly at home to avoid attention. The door was shut, but religious practice did not disappear.

Accept historically accurate examples from the passage. For the museum label, look for a government action and distinct effects on a religious leader and an ordinary believer.