

# THE ORTHODOX CHURCH,

TIMOTHY<sup>1)</sup> WARE<sup>2)</sup>  
*(Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia)*

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PENGUIN BOOKS

It has not been easy for Archbishop Seraphim (elected 1974) to provide the imaginative leadership that is essential at such a time of crisis and opportunity. But in Athens, Thessalonica and other cities, the high calibre of many of the younger married clergy is unmistakable. Wherever there is a parish priest of energy and intelligence, the response from the laity, and not least from the youth, is usually most encouraging. Greek Orthodoxy has been passing through some difficult times, but there is still vigour and new life in the old tree.

## CHAPTER 8

## *The Twentieth Century, II: Orthodoxy and the Militant Atheists*

'Those who desire to see Me shall pass through tribulation and despair.'

*Epistle of Barnabas vii, 11*

### 'THE ASSAULT UPON HEAVEN'

From October 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized power, until around 1988, the year when Russian Christianity celebrated its millennium, the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union existed in a state of siege. The intensity of persecution varied at different points in those seventy years, but the basic attitude of the Communist authorities remained the same: religious belief, in all its manifestations, was an error to be repressed and extirpated. In Stalin's words, 'The Party cannot be neutral towards religion. It conducts an anti-religious struggle against all and any religious prejudices.'<sup>1</sup> To appreciate the full force of his words, it has to be remembered that the Party, under Soviet Communism, to all intents and purposes meant the State.

In this way, from 1917 onwards, Orthodox and other Christians found themselves in a situation for which there was no exact precedent in earlier Christian history. The Roman Empire, although persecuting Christians from time to time, was in no sense an atheist state, committed to the suppression of religion as such. The Ottoman Turks, while non-Christians, were still worshippers of the one God and, as we have seen, allowed the Church a large measure of toleration. But Soviet Communism was committed by its fundamental principles to an aggressive and militant atheism. It could not rest satisfied merely with a neutral separation between Church and State,

1. *Works*, vol. 10 (Moscow 1953), p. 132.

but sought by every means, direct and indirect, to overthrow all organized Church life and to eliminate all religious belief.

The Bolsheviks, newly come to power, were quick to carry their programme into effect. Legislation in 1918 excluded the Church from all participation in the educational system, and confiscated all Church property. The Church ceased to possess any rights; quite simply, it was not a legal entity. The terms of the Soviet constitution grew progressively more severe. The constitution of 1918 allowed 'freedom of religious and anti-religious propaganda' (Article 13), but in the 'Law on Religious Associations' enacted in 1929 this was changed to 'freedom of religious *belief* and of anti-religious *propaganda*'. The distinction here is important: Christians were allowed – at any rate in theory – freedom of belief, but they were not allowed any freedom of propaganda. The Church was seen merely as a cultic association. It was in principle permitted to celebrate religious services, and in practice – more particularly from 1943 onwards – there were a certain number of church buildings open for worship. Also, after 1943, the Church was allowed to maintain a few institutions for training priests, and to undertake a limited publishing programme. But it was allowed to do virtually nothing beyond this.

The bishops and clergy, in other words, could not engage in charitable or social work. Sick visiting was severely restricted; pastoral work in prisons, hospitals or psychiatric wards was impossible. Parish priests could not organize any kind of youth group or any study circle. They could not hold catechism classes or Sunday schools for children. The only instruction that they could give to their flock was through sermons during church services. (Often they took full advantage of this: I can recall attending celebrations of the Liturgy in the 1970s at which four or five different sermons were preached; the congregation listened with rapt attention, and thanked the preacher at the end with a great cry of gratitude – an experience I do not usually have when preaching in the west!) The clergy could not form a parish library, since the only books which they were permitted to keep in church were service books for use in worship. They had no pamphlets to distribute to their people,

no informative literature, however basic; even copies of the Bible were a great rarity, exchanged on the black market at exorbitant prices. Worst of all, every member of the clergy, from the bishop to the humblest parish priest, required permission from the State to exercise his ministry, and was subject to close and relentless supervision from the secret police. Every word that the priest spoke in his sermons was carefully noted. Throughout the day, watchful and unfriendly eyes would observe who came to him in church for baptisms and weddings, for confession or for private talks.

The totalitarian Communist State employed to the full all forms of anti-religious propaganda, while denying the Church any right of reply. There was, first of all, the atheist instruction that was given systematically in every school. Teachers received such injunctions as these:

A Soviet teacher must be guided by the principle of the Party spirit of science; he is obliged not only to be an unbeliever himself, but also to be an active propagandist of godlessness among others, to be the bearer of the ideas of militant proletarian atheism. Skilfully and calmly, tactfully and persistently, the Soviet teacher must expose and overcome religious prejudices in the course of his activity in school and out of school, day in and day out.<sup>1</sup>

Outside school, a vast anti-religious campaign was carried on by the League of Militant Atheists; this was replaced in 1942 by the slightly less aggressive All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Scientific and Political Knowledge. Atheism was actively propagated among the new generation through the Young Communist League. Museums of Religion and Atheism were opened, often in former churches such as Kazan Cathedral in St Petersburg. In the 1920s, anti-religious processions of a crude and offensive character were held in the streets, especially at Easter and Christmas. Here is a description by an eye-witness:

There were no protests from the silent streets – the years of terror

1. F. N. Oleschuk (formerly Secretary of the League of Militant Atheists), in *Uchitelskaya Gazeta*, 26 November 1949.

had done their work – but nearly everyone tried to turn off the road when they met this shocking procession. I, personally, as a witness of the Moscow carnival, may certify that there was not a drop of popular pleasure in it. The parade moved along empty streets and its attempts at creating laughter or provocation met with dull silence on the part of the occasional witnesses.<sup>1</sup>

Not only were churches closed on a massive scale in the 1920s and 1930s, but huge numbers of bishops and clergy, monks, nuns and laity were sent to prison and to concentration camps. How many were executed or died from ill-treatment we simply cannot calculate. Nikita Struve provides a list of martyr-bishops running to 130 names, and even this he terms 'provisional and incomplete'.<sup>2</sup> The sum total of priest-martyrs must extend to tens of thousands. Of course religious believers were by no means the only group to suffer in Stalin's reign of terror, but they suffered more than most. Nothing on a remotely comparable scale had happened in the persecutions under the Roman Empire. The words of Archpriest Avvakum, spoken in the seventeenth century, were certainly fulfilled under Communism three hundred years later: 'Satan has obtained our radiant Russia from God, that she may become red with the blood of martyrs.'<sup>3</sup>

What effect did Communist propaganda and persecution have upon the Church? In many places there was an amazing quickening of the spiritual life. Cleansed of worldly elements, freed from the burden of insincere members who had merely conformed outwardly for social reasons, purified as by fire, the true Orthodox believers gathered themselves together and resisted with heroism and humility. A Russian of the emigration wrote, 'In every place where the faith has been put to the test, there have been abundant outpourings of grace, the most astonishing miracles – icons renewing themselves before the eyes of astonished spectators; the cupolas of churches shining with a

1. G. P. Fedotov, *The Russian Church since the Revolution* (London 1928), p. 47.

2. Nikita Struve, *Christians in Contemporary Russia*, pp. 393–8.

3. From Avvakum's *Life*; see Fedotov, *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, p. 167.

light not of this world . . . Nevertheless, all this was scarcely noticed. The glorious aspect of what had taken place in Russia remained almost without interest for the generality of mankind . . . The crucified and buried Christ will always be judged thus by those who are blind to the light of His resurrection.'<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising that enormous numbers should have deserted the Church in the hour of persecution, for this has always happened, and will doubtless happen again. Far more surprising is the fact that so many remained faithful.

'RENDER TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S':  
WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE?

In a time of religious persecution the underlying principles involved are usually clear-cut, but the practical course of action which each believer ought to follow is often not clear-cut at all. How far could bishops, priests and laity go in co-operating with a regime that was openly dedicated to the overthrow of religion? Russian Orthodox Christians in the years 1917–88 have answered this crucial question in many conflicting ways. Persons in the west, who have never lived under persecution, need to be highly circumspect in passing any moral judgement on the actions of those within Russia. But we can at least note certain variations in attitude.

Church-State relations in the Soviet Union may be divided into five main periods:

- (1) 1917–25: Patriarch Tikhon struggles to preserve the liberty of the Church.
- (2) 1925–43: Metropolitan Sergius seeks a *modus vivendi*.
- (3) 1943–59: Stalin allows a revival of Church life in the post-war years.
- (4) 1959–64: Khrushchev renews the persecution.
- (5) 1964–88: a dissident movement emerges and is crushed.

1. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 245–6. The miraculous 'renewal of icons', to which Lossky refers, has occurred in a number of places under Communist rule. Icons and frescoes, darkened and disfigured with age, have suddenly and without any human intervention resumed fresh and bright colours.

(1) 1917-25. At the outset the Patriarch of Moscow, St Tikhon, adopted a firm and uncompromising attitude towards the Bolsheviks. On 1 February 1918 he anathematized and excommunicated those whom he termed 'the enemies of Christ, open or disguised', 'the godless rulers of the darkness of our time'. This anathema was confirmed by the All-Russian Council in session at Moscow at the time, and it has never subsequently been revoked. Later in 1918 the Patriarch publicly denounced the murder of Emperor Nicolas II as a heinous crime, adding, 'Whoever does not condemn it will be guilty of his blood.' When the Communists were preparing to celebrate the first anniversary of the October Revolution, he called on them to desist from 'the persecution and destruction of the innocent'. No one else at that moment had the courage openly to raise their voice on behalf of justice and human rights. At the same time, however, Tikhon avoided taking sides on any strictly political question, and refused to send his blessing to General Denikin, the White Army leader in the Crimea.

The Communists were naturally dissatisfied with Tikhon's stance and made determined efforts to break down his resistance. From May 1922 to June 1923 he was kept in prison, and, while there, he was persuaded to hand over the control of the Church to a group of married clergy, which unknown to him was acting in co-operation with the Communist authorities. This group, which came to be known as the 'Renewed' or 'Living Church', initiated a sweeping programme of ecclesiastical reform, including the introduction of married bishops.<sup>1</sup> Even though many of the reforms were not objectionable in themselves, the movement was compromised from the start by its collaboration with the atheist authorities. Tikhon, as soon as he realized its true character, broke off relations with it. Despite initial successes, it soon lost support among the faithful, and as a result the Communists ceased to be interested in it. After 1926 the Living Church and its offshoots no longer possessed any great importance, and during the Second World

1. In the Orthodox Church bishops have to be monks (see p. 291).

War they disappeared altogether. The first attempt by the Bolsheviks to take over the Church had proved a fiasco.

What pressures St Tikhon underwent in custody we do not know, but on emerging from prison he spoke in a more conciliatory tone than he had done in 1917-18. This is evident in his 'Confession', issued shortly before his release in 1923, and in his 'Will', signed on the day of his death (there is some dispute over the authenticity of this last). Yet he still strove to adopt a neutral, non-political position, such as would safeguard the inner freedom of the Church. As he put it in 1923:

The Russian Orthodox Church is non-political, and henceforward does not want to be either a Red or a White Church; it should and will be the One Catholic Apostolic Church, and all attempts coming from any side to embroil the Church in the political struggle should be rejected and condemned.

St Tikhon died suddenly, under mysterious circumstances. Certainly a confessor for the faith, very possibly he was also a martyr.

(2) 1925-43. Tikhon realized that when he died it would not be possible for a council to assemble freely, as in 1917, and to elect a new Patriarch. He therefore designated his own successor, appointing three *locum tenentes* or 'guardians' of the Patriarchal throne: Metropolitans Cyril, Agathangel and Peter. The first two were already in prison at the time of Tikhon's death, so that in April 1925 Peter, Metropolitan of Krutitsy, became Patriarchal *locum tenens*. In December 1925 Peter was arrested and exiled to Siberia, where he remained until his death in 1936. After Peter's arrest, Sergius (Stragorodsky) (1867-1944), Metropolitan of Nizhni-Novgorod, took over the leadership in his stead, with the unusual title 'Deputy to the *locum tenens*'. Sergius had joined the Living Church in 1922, but in 1924 had made his submission to Tikhon, who restored him to his former position.

At first Sergius sought to continue the policy adopted by Tikhon in the last years of his Patriarchate. In a declaration issued on 10 June 1926, while emphasizing that the Church

respected the laws of the Soviet Union, he said that bishops could not be expected to enter into any special undertaking to prove their loyalty. He continued, 'We cannot accept the duty of watching over the political tendencies of our co-religionists.' This was in effect a request for a true separation between Church and State: Sergius wanted to keep the Church out of politics, and therefore declined to make it an agent of Soviet policy. In this same declaration he also spoke openly of the incompatibility and the 'contradictions' existing between Christianity and Communism. 'Far from promising reconciliation with the irreconcilable and from pretending to adapt our faith to Communism, we will remain from the religious point of view what we are, that is, members of the traditional Church.'

But in 1927 – a crucial year for Church-State relations in Russia – Sergius changed his position. He spent from December 1926 to March 1927 in prison; as in Tikhon's case, we do not know to what pressures he was subjected during internment. After his release, he issued a new declaration on 29 July 1927, significantly different from that of the previous year. He said nothing this time about the 'contradictions' between Christianity and Communism; he no longer pleaded for a separation between Church and State, but associated the two as closely as possible:

We wish to be Orthodox and at the same time to recognize the Soviet Union as our civil fatherland, whose joys and successes are our joys and successes, and whose failures are our failures. Every blow directed against the Union . . . we regard as a blow directed against us.

In 1926 Sergius had declined to watch over the political tendencies of his co-religionists; but he now demanded from the clergy abroad 'a written promise of their complete loyalty to the Soviet government'.<sup>1</sup>

This 1927 declaration caused great distress to many Orthodox both within and outside Russia. It seemed that Sergius had compromised the Church in a way that Tikhon had never

1. For the full text of the 1926 and 1927 declarations by Sergius, see Matthew Spinka, *The Church in Soviet Russia* (New York 1956), pp. 157–65.

done. In identifying the Church so closely with a government dedicated wholeheartedly to the overthrow of all religion, he appeared to be attempting the very thing which in 1926 he had refused to do – to reconcile the irreconcilable. The victory of atheism would certainly be a joy and success for the Soviet State; would it also be a joy and success for the Church? The dissolution of the League of Militant Atheists would be a blow to the Communist government, but scarcely a blow to the Church. How could the Russian clergy abroad be expected to put their signature to a written promise of complete loyalty to the Soviet government, when many of them had now become citizens of another country? It is hardly surprising that Metropolitan Antony, head of the Karlovtsy Synod (representing the Russian bishops in exile),<sup>1</sup> should have replied to Sergius by quoting 2 Corinthians vi, 14–15: 'Can light consort with darkness? Can Christ agree with Belial, or a believer with an unbeliever?' He continued, 'The Church cannot bless anti-Christian, much less atheistical politics.' It was the 1927 declaration of Sergius which led to a final breach between the Karlovtsy Synod and the Church authorities in Moscow. Ever since then, the exiled Synod has condemned what it labels 'Sergianism', that is to say, the capitulation of the Church to the atheist government. Metropolitan Evlogy of Paris, the Exarch for western Europe, sought at first to conform to Sergius' requests, but from 1930 he too found it impossible to maintain direct links with the Church in Moscow.

The policy of Sergius also provoked widespread opposition within Russia. Many recalled that he had been a supporter of the Living Church, and they felt he was now pursuing the same collaborationist policy under a slightly different form. The Communists had failed in their first attempt to take over the Church through the reforming movement; now it seemed that, with Sergius' help, they were succeeding in their second attempt. Had Sergius summoned a council of all his fellow bishops in 1927 – of course, the conditions of the time made this impossible – it is very doubtful whether a majority would

1. See below, p. 176.

have supported him. It was rumoured that even the Patriarchal *locum tenens*, Metropolitan Peter, was opposed to the 1927 declaration, but it is impossible to be sure of this. Certainly Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd, together with a number of senior hierarchs, disapproved so strongly of Sergius' policy that they broke off all communion with him.

Although Joseph and his main supporters were quickly removed from the scene and died in internment, the movement which they had started continued to exist underground. A 'Catacomb Church' was formed, with bishops and priests working in secret, without any links with the official Church under Sergius. Bishop Maximus (Shishilenko) of Serpukhov played an important part in the establishment of this secret Church; he had been Patriarch Tikhon's private physician, and claimed that it was Tikhon's wish that the Church should go underground if Communist pressure became intolerable. The Catacomb Church – it might be more correct to say 'the Catacomb Christians', for it is not clear how far there was a single unified organization – survived into the 1980s, although probably with only a limited number of members. Sometimes it was called the 'True Orthodox Church'.

There were other Russian Orthodox, however, who supported the policy of Metropolitan Sergius. They felt that he was sincerely seeking to protect the Church. They defended his actions as a 'necessary sin'; to save his flock from destruction, he had humbly taken upon himself the 'martyrdom' of lying. It was indeed the case that he was required to tell many lies. In an interview with foreign journalists in 1930, for example, he went so far as to claim that there had never been any persecution of religion in the Soviet Union. To many inside Russia and abroad, this seemed to be a cruel denial of the sufferings of the new Russian martyrs for Christ's sake. Members of the Russian Orthodox Church remain to this day deeply divided in their estimate of Sergius' conduct.

The concessions which Sergius made in 1927 at first brought the Church little apparent advantage. The closure of churches and the liquidation of the clergy continued unabated in the 1930s. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the

outward structure of the Church had been all but annihilated. Only about four bishops were still allowed to function, and there were probably no more than a few hundred churches open in the whole of Russia; all the theological schools and all the monasteries had long since been closed. It was a dark moment for the Russian Church, but a startling change was soon to come. The entire situation was transformed by a new development – the war.

(3) 1943–59. On 21 June 1941 Germany invaded Russia; and on that very same day, without waiting for matters to develop, Metropolitan Sergius issued a pastoral letter calling on Orthodox Christians to spring to the defence of their threatened country. From that point onwards the Moscow Patriarchate gave unwavering support to the war effort; as the Church leaders saw it, they were fighting not for Communism but for their fatherland. Meanwhile the Germans, in the parts of Russia which they occupied, permitted the restoration of religious life. The revival was immediate, spontaneous and intense. Churches were reopened everywhere in the Ukraine and Byelorussia; a particularly dynamic renewal occurred in the diocese of Pskov, under the leadership of its young Metropolitan Sergius (Voskresensky) (1899–1944).<sup>1</sup> It was abundantly clear that twenty years of persecution had not destroyed the faith of the people.

Desperately hard pressed in the struggle against the Germans, Stalin thought it prudent to make some concessions to the Christians under his rule. It was clear that believers still formed a significant portion of the population, and Stalin needed the help of every single Russian if he were to win the war. In gratitude for the support of Sergius and his clergy – and doubtless conscious also that he could hardly afford to be less generous than the Germans – he relaxed the pressure on the Church. At first the concessions were small, but on 4 September 1943 Stalin summoned Sergius and two other metropolitans

1. See Struve, *Christians in Contemporary Russia*, pp. 68–73. Sergius Voskresensky is not to be confused with the Patriarchal *locum tenens* Sergius Stragorodsky.

into his presence, and gave permission for the election of a new Patriarch. Three days later a modest council of nineteen bishops elected Sergius. Already an old man, he died in the following year, and in February 1945 Metropolitan Alexis of Leningrad (1877–1970), a staunch supporter of Sergius since 1927, was elected Patriarch in his place.

Permission to restore the Patriarchate was no more than the first step. In the immediate post-war years Stalin also permitted a major reconstruction of the Church. According to statistics issued by the Moscow Patriarchate, by 1947 the number of open churches had risen to over 20,000; there were some sixty-seven functioning monasteries, two theological academies and eight seminaries. Here was a situation utterly different from the late 1930s. It might be thought that the post-war resurrection of Church life was a posthumous vindication of Sergius' policy since 1927. But this would be a false conclusion. What saved the Church was not the leadership of Sergius, but an historical accident – the war – and also, more fundamentally, the faithful endurance of the believing Russian people.

There were, however, limits to Stalin's toleration. The Church was not allowed to do anything except conduct Church services and train future priests. It still could undertake no social activities, no youth work, no religious education of children. The Soviet government continued to treat religion as an enemy to be combated through all forms of propaganda, while the Church was not allowed to answer back. The secret police interfered in every aspect of the Church's inner life. Moreover, in return for restricted toleration, the Church leaders were expected to be 'loyal' to the government. This meant not only that they had to refrain from any criticism of the Soviet authorities, but they were also required to support Communist policies actively at home and more particularly abroad. None of the legislation against religion was repealed, and it was open to the authorities to resume active persecution at any time, whenever they should judge it expedient.

(4) 1959–64. Up to his death in 1953, Stalin maintained the post-war status quo. The last eight years of his rule (1945–53)

were the most favourable period for the Russian Church during the whole of the Communist era. But in 1959 Khrushchev launched a major offensive against the Church, displaying a harshness that was all the more striking because of the liberalization that he allowed in other directions. Bishops, priests, monks and nuns were tried and imprisoned on fabricated 'criminal charges'; the clergy everywhere underwent a good deal of harassment and some physical violence. Churches were closed on a massive scale, and the total number was reduced to around 7,000, representing a loss of two-thirds. The seminaries were reduced from eight to three, and the number of functioning monasteries fell from sixty-seven to twenty-one. Particularly severe restrictions were placed upon Church work with the young: priests were often forbidden to give communion to children, and parents arriving for the Liturgy with their young families were turned back at the church door by plain-clothes police. The dimensions of this persecution passed largely unnoticed in the west, in particular because the Church authorities in Russia made no open protests. When speaking in the west in such forums as the World Council of Churches or the Prague Peace Conference, they pretended that all was 'normal' in Church-State relations. The anti-religious campaign ceased abruptly with Khrushchev's removal from power, but the Church was not allowed to make good the losses which it had suffered.

(5) 1964–88. So far as official Church-State relations were concerned, this was a period of outward calm. The State continued to supervise the Church closely, through the KGB and in other ways; the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate continued to work as best it could within the narrow limits permitted by the Communist authorities. Had this leadership been more dynamic and vociferous – as many prominent Baptists were in Russia at this time – might not the Church in fact have obtained far greater concessions from the State? Need the Church hierarchy have been so consistently submissive?

These were questions that began to be asked more and more during the late 1960s and 1970s, not only by western observers



but by Orthodox Christians within the Soviet Union. And it is precisely this that constitutes the most striking new development in the fifth period of Church-State relations under Communism. Even if the leadership kept silent, others did not. A dissident movement emerged within the Orthodox Church in Russia, which openly protested against State interference in the Church's internal life. The protestors received no encouragement whatever from the Patriarch and the Holy Synod – quite the contrary – but none the less their numbers grew steadily.

The first prominent figure among the Orthodox dissidents was Anatoly Krasnov-Levitin, who from 1958 onwards produced a stream of *samizdat*<sup>1</sup> articles, describing the religious persecution and the sufferings of believers. Similar accounts were compiled by the layman Boris Talantov, who died in a labour camp. But the most influential single document to come from the religious dissident movement was the Open Letter addressed in November 1965 to Patriarch Alexis by two Moscow priests, Fr Nicolas Eshliman and Fr Gleb Yakunin. They mentioned in detail the repressive measures taken against the Church by the Communist authorities and the lack of resistance, even the apparent co-operation, of the Church authorities. They appealed to the Patriarch to act: 'The suffering Church turns to you with hope. You have been invested with the staff of primatial authority. You have the power as Patriarch to put an end to this lawlessness with one word! Do this!'<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, yet perhaps predictably, the Patriarch's only response was to suspend the two priests from their ministry. But the letter acted as a catalyst, inspiring many other believers to express their long-pent-up feelings. At last the Church seemed to be breaking free from the oppressive web of evasion and half-truths that was smothering it. One of those inspired

1. Writings not published officially, but circulated more or less secretly in typescript or manuscript.

2. Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History*, p. 292. The two priests wrote a second letter to Podgorny, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

by the example of Fr Gleb and Fr Nicolas was the novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who in 1972 wrote a forceful 'Lenten Letter' addressed to Patriarch Pimen (1910–90), the successor of Alexis, in which he emphasized the tragic irony of the Church's present predicament:

By what reasoning is it possible to convince oneself that the planned *destruction* of the spirit and body of the Church under the guidance of the atheists is the best way of *preserving* it? Rescuing it *for whom*? Certainly not for Christ. Preserving it *by what means*? By falsehood? But after the falsehood by whose hands are the holy sacraments to be celebrated?

His own solution to the Church's problems lay in the one word 'sacrifice': 'Though deprived of all material strength the Church is always victorious in sacrifice.'<sup>1</sup>

In 1976 the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights was founded, which aimed to help Orthodox and non-Orthodox believers alike. The committee was set up in close co-operation with the Helsinki Monitoring Group, which dealt with the infringement of human rights in general. Recognizing that freedom is indivisible, the Christian dissidents sought to work constructively with the broader dissident movement. Important protests against religious oppression were also made by the Christian Seminar, an informal study group for young Russian Orthodox intellectuals founded in 1974 by Alexander Ogorodnikov, and headed after Ogorodnikov's arrest in 1978 by Lev Regelson. The Russian feminist movement which began in Leningrad in 1979 included a number of Orthodox believers such as Tatiana Goricheva.

From 1976 onwards the Communist authorities reacted to the dissident movement with increasing severity, and by 1980 most of the leading Orthodox members had been silenced. Some were sent to labour camps and exile, others were discredited by the KGB in various ways. The general prospect was discouraging. More than a decade of public dissent had brought about, so it seemed, no change in the basic relationship between the Church and the atheist State. The Church had not secured

1. Ellis, p. 304.

freedom from Communist interference, and there seemed little likelihood that it would do so in the immediate future. So far as both the government and the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate were concerned, it was 'business as usual'.

And then, contrary to all human expectation, there was an abrupt and fundamental change. The Communist regime, seemingly all-powerful over the past seven decades, collapsed like a house of cards.

#### A TROUBLED RENAISSANCE

On 11 March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Seven years later, at the beginning of 1992, Gorbachev was no longer in power and the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. But as a result of the policies of *glasnost* ('openness') and *perestroika* ('restructuring') which he had initiated, the Russian Church found itself suddenly liberated from all the repressive measures that had crippled its life since 1917. Without recovering the position of privilege that it had enjoyed under the Tsarist regime, the Church was at last basically free. Yet the qualification 'basically' needs still to be added, for there continued to be cases of obstruction by government officials at the local level, and even of intimidation from the KGB. After all, especially in the middle and lower strata of the administration, most of those who worked for Communism were still in office. Leopards do not change their spots overnight.

The most significant change has been at the level of legislation. During 1990-91, in almost all parts of what was once the Soviet Union, new regulations came into force, cancelling the 'Law on Religious Associations' originally enacted in 1929. There is now, for the first time, a true and genuine separation between Church and State. The State no longer promotes atheism. The Orthodox Church - along with other religious bodies - is recognized as a legal entity, with the right to own property. Some restrictions still remain, however, as regards the opening of churches, since permission is needed from the civil authorities. But the Church is now at liberty to engage in

social and philanthropic work, and services can be held in hospitals and prisons. Missionary activities are permitted. Youth groups and Bible study circles are allowed. The Church can publish religious literature and teach religion to children; indeed, religious instruction may even be given in State institutions.

Legislation, however, is valueless if it remains a dead letter and is not carried into practical effect. In fact, from 1988 onwards the Church had already been allowed to do most of the things that were now permitted by law. During 1989-92 Russian Orthodoxy was able to make an important start in rebuilding its outward structures. The accompanying chart (see p. 162) indicates the vicissitudes of the Church during the past seven decades: almost total annihilation by the eve of the Second World War; revival in the immediate post-war years; heavy losses (chiefly because of the persecution during 1959-64); and then from 1988 rapid reconstruction (although there are still far fewer churches and priests than in 1947). Churches have been opened, during 1989-92, at the rate of about thirty a week; the State has given back many historic monasteries; educational institutions for future clergy have expanded.

Yet it would be grossly misleading to suggest that all is now well. The political and economic situation in the former Soviet Union during 1991-2 was highly unstable, and the future remains uncertain. The problems facing the Church are formidable. The State is handing back church buildings and monasteries in a condition of shocking dilapidation, and the cost of repairs is stretching the Church's finances to the utmost. The central administration of the Patriarchate, from all accounts, is virtually bankrupt; local congregations are providing donations on a sacrificial scale, but they can do all too little with Russia in the grip of an economic crisis. The constant creation of new parishes is placing the existing clergy under immense strain; even before 1988 they were severely overworked, and there are now far too few to go round. The Church needs at least 7,000 more priests in the immediate future. There are regular complaints that the curriculum in the theological schools is narrow and outdated, and fails to prepare the clergy for the radically

*Institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church*

	1914	1939	1947	1988	1992
Churches	54,174	some 100s	?20,000	about 7,000	over 12,000
Priests and deacons	51,105	some 100s	?30,000	about 7,000	about 10,000
Monasteries (for both men and women)	1,025	none	67	21	121
Monks and nuns	94,629	?	?10,000	1,190	?
Theological academies	4	none	2	2	2
Seminaries	57	none	8	3	25
Pre-theological schools	185	forbidden by law	forbidden by law	forbidden by law	
Students	?	none	?	2,000	4,000
Parochial schools	37,528	forbidden by law	forbidden by law	forbidden by law	no statistics available; rapidly proliferating
Homes for the aged	1,113				
Hospitals	291				
Parish libraries	34,497				

new pastoral situation that awaits them. The supply of religious literature, despite help from the west, falls pitifully short of the needs. For seventy years the Church has been excluded from all social and charitable work, and although everywhere there are open doors – State hospitals and old people’s homes are for the most part only too eager to welcome voluntary help from believers – the Church authorities simply have no practical expertise in this field. Equally they have no experience whatever in organized youth work or in the religious teaching of children. They are having to start from nothing.

Nor is this all. Less tangible but equally grave problems confront the Church as it comes to terms with what is now a pluralist society. Russian Orthodoxy under Communism was in a paradoxical way still to some extent a ‘State Church’, protected by the authorities as well as persecuted. Now this is no longer so. Roman Catholics and Protestants are free to carry out missionary work in Russia. The Orthodox resent this as an intrusion, but they are powerless to stop it. All kinds of other religious or pseudo-religious movements – Hare Krishna, occultism, even explicitly satanic cults – are likewise offering their own particular version of the spiritual way to a bewildered Russian public that is eagerly seeking the meaning of life, but has little idea where to turn. In the post-Communist era Russian Orthodoxy is having to face competition from all sides.

There are other reasons for disquiet. The organization of the KGB still survives more or less intact, and many elements in it are hostile to religion. It is widely believed that the brutal murder of Fr Alexander Men (1935–90), a priest of energy and independent views, was instigated by the secret police. There are also sinister elements within the Church itself. The strongly nationalist Orthodox organization *Pamyat* (‘Remembrance’), in which some priests are active, is more or less openly anti-Semitic. Despite firm condemnation from leading bishops, anti-Semitism continues to enjoy a good deal of popular support. Unfortunately, this is true of other Orthodox Churches as well as the Russian.

How far is the present hierarchy able to cope with all these difficulties? Its moral authority is somewhat tarnished. With

the opening up of the KGB files in 1992, many of the laity have been scandalized to discover the extent of the collaboration under Communism between certain bishops and the secret police. There is also a feeling among laypeople that the bishops, formed in the Soviet period when all their pastoral activities were strictly supervised, are all too often over-passive in the new situation, and lack the intelligence and imagination to seize the opportunities now before them. But this is certainly not true of such leading hierarchs as Metropolitan Kyrill of Smolensk and Archbishop Chrysostom of Irkutsk. Opinions differ over the past collaboration or otherwise between the present Patriarch Alexis II (elected in 1990) and the Communist authorities, but on the whole he is thought to have shown firmness and independence in his dealings as a diocesan bishop with the Soviet State. Under his leadership the episcopate in 1992 proceeded for the first time to canonize some of the new martyrs who suffered under Communism. For Russian Orthodoxy this is a step of great spiritual significance. Three saints in particular were proclaimed: the sister-in-law of Emperor Nicolas II, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, who became a nun after the assassination of her husband by terrorists in 1905 and was herself killed by the Bolsheviks in 1918; Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev, assassinated in 1918; and Metropolitan Benjamin of Petrograd, shot after a show trial in 1922.

A particularly thorny problem troubling Russian Orthodoxy is the revival of Eastern-rite Catholicism. In 1946 the Greek Catholic Church of the Ukraine, set up in 1596 through the Union of Brest-Litovsk<sup>1</sup> and numbering about 3,500,000, was reincorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church and ceased to exist. While there were doubtless some Ukrainian Catholics whose return to Orthodoxy was voluntary, there can be little doubt that the vast majority wished to continue as they were, in union with the Papacy. Not one of the Ukrainian bishops was in favour of the return; all alike were arrested, and most died in prison or exile. Because of direct coercion and police terrorism, many clergy and laity chose to conform outwardly

1. See above, p. 95.

to the Orthodox Church, while still remaining Catholic in their inward convictions; others preferred to go underground. The hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate, in conniving at the persecution of their fellow Christians by Stalin and the atheist authorities, were placed in an unenviably equivocal situation. Surely, as a matter of basic principle, no Christian should ever support acts of violence against the conscience of other Christians. The fate of the Greek Catholics after the Second World War is perhaps the darkest chapter in the story of the Moscow Patriarchate's collusion with Communism.

Yet, though driven underground, eastern Catholicism was not exterminated. One of the fruits of Gorbachev's *glasnost* was that at the end of 1989 the Greek Catholic Church of the Ukraine was once more legalized. By 1987 it was already becoming abundantly clear that the Greek Catholics would re-emerge from the catacombs and seek to recover the churches, now in Orthodox hands, that had once belonged to them. If only the Moscow Patriarchate had taken the initiative in proposing a peaceful and negotiated solution, it would have won immense moral authority, and much subsequent bitterness could have been avoided. Regrettably there was no such initiative. In 1987, and again in 1988, the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky, approached the Moscow Patriarchate both verbally and in writing, proposing that the two sides, Orthodox and Catholic, should make a public and formal gesture of mutual forgiveness; but no response came from the Moscow Patriarchate. It is easy to understand how wounding the Greek Catholics found this silence. Now the moment of opportunity has passed. From 1989 onwards there have been sharp local disputes, often marked by violence, over the possession of church buildings. With passions thoroughly aroused on both sides, reconciliation is going to prove slow.

Alongside the problem of relations between Orthodox and Greek Catholics in the Ukraine, and closely connected with it, there is the question of Ukrainian nationalism. The Ukraine has now become an independent state, and so most Ukrainian Orthodox want their Church to be independent as well. A Ukrainian Autocephalous Church was in fact founded after the

revolution. At an assembly in Kiev in 1921, the delegates – unable to find any Orthodox hierarch who would join the autocephalist movement – decided to create a Ukrainian episcopate by themselves, without any consecrating bishop. The resulting ‘self-consecrated’ Ukrainian hierarchy, as it was termed, has never been recognized by the rest of the Orthodox Church; for a time, however, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church flourished, with 26 bishops, 2,500 priests and 2,000 parishes, but in the 1930s it was liquidated by Stalin. It was revived in the Second World War under German occupation, this time with bishops possessing the apostolic succession, but was suppressed once more by Stalin when the war ended. In 1989 the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church was once more revived, with the support of a retired bishop of the Moscow Patriarch, John (Bodnarchuk).

By early 1992 the ecclesiastical situation in the Ukraine had become totally confused. The Greek Catholics had around 2,700 parishes; the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, by now split into two groups (neither of them recognized by any other Orthodox Church), had about 1,500 parishes; the main body of Orthodox – also divided into two groups, the one recognized by the Moscow Patriarchate, the other not – had some 5,500 parishes. On the Orthodox side, the only long-term solution is a fully independent Ukrainian Autocephalous Church; this would need the recognition of the Moscow Patriarchate and also that of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to whose jurisdiction the Ukraine belonged before 1686. But this is going to make a major difference to the situation of the Moscow Patriarchate, since in the post-war period no less than two-thirds of all the open churches in the entire Soviet Union were located in the Ukraine, while perhaps as many as 70 per cent of the students in the seminaries were Ukrainian. For Orthodox everywhere in the former Soviet Union, this is a time of great hope – and also great anxiety.

#### EASTERN EUROPE: A VARIED PICTURE

Hope and anxiety: the same words apply to the present situation of the other seven Orthodox Churches previously under

Communist rule. Apart from the Church of Georgia, their experience of Communism has been briefer than that of Russian Orthodoxy – forty rather than seventy years. The Communist regimes established after the Second World War followed the same general principles as the Soviet Union had done. The Church was excluded from social and charitable work. In most cases, it was also forbidden to undertake educational activities, except for the training of priests. The Church authorities were expected to support the government; semi-political ‘confederations of priests’ were formed under Communist patronage, and priests had usually to take an oath of loyalty to the Communist authorities. But the number of arrests and the extent to which churches were closed varied from country to country.

Conditions were worst of all for the *Church of Albania*, which had been granted autocephaly in 1937 by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In 1967 the government of Hoxha announced that Albania was now the first truly atheist state in the world: every place of worship had been closed and every visible expression of religious faith eliminated. Repression fell with equal severity on Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Muslims. The last primate of the Albanian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Damian, died in prison in 1973. In 1991, when religion began to emerge from underground, no Orthodox bishops at all had survived, and less than twenty Orthodox priests were still alive, half of them too infirm to officiate. Churches are now being reopened, new clergy ordained, and a small theological school has been started. In 1992 Bishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), who has worked as a missionary in East Africa, was appointed Archbishop of Tirana, and three other diocesan bishops were elected; all four are Greeks.

At the other extreme, the Orthodox Church under Communist rule which has best preserved its outward structure is the *Church of Romania*. When the Communists took over in 1948, there was little closure of churches. The Romanian Patriarchate retained its theological academies and was able to go on publishing periodicals and other books on a large scale. This favourable situation was due partly to the friendly links that Patriarch Justinian (in office 1948–77) maintained with the new rulers.

At times he identified himself to a surprising degree with Marxist ideology, but he was also a devoted pastor, respected and loved by his Orthodox flock. Throughout the Communist period the number of clergy in Romania continued to rise, and many new churches were opened. Under Justinian's inspiration, there was also a striking monastic renewal, based on the best traditions of Hesychasm, with an emphasis on the Jesus Prayer. The spirit of St Paissy Velichkovsky is very much alive in Romania today, and there are some outstanding 'elders' such as Fr Cleopas of Sihastria. In 1946 an edition of the *Philokalia* began to appear, prepared by the greatest Romanian theologian of the twentieth century, Archpriest Dumitru Staniloae. Far more than a mere translation from the Greek, this contains introductions and notes drawing on western critical research, but displaying also a fine appreciation of Orthodox spirituality. The Romanian *Philokalia* reached its eleventh volume in 1990. The Romanian Church, however, has also had to face persecution, especially in 1958 when many priests, monks and nuns were imprisoned, including Fr Staniloae. In his later years Ceausescu closed and destroyed many churches.

There was a heavy price to pay for the relative toleration that Romanian Orthodoxy enjoyed. Church life was closely supervised in all its aspects by the secret police, and this meant that, by the time Ceausescu fell in December 1989, the Church's moral authority had been gravely impaired because of its co-operation with the hated regime. Patriarch Teoctist (elected 1986) thought it right to resign from office in January 1990, but he was reinstated by the Holy Synod in the following April. The future leadership of the Romanian Church, however, will certainly depend on the younger bishops appointed since the end of Communism, such as Metropolitan Daniel (Cibotea) of Moldavia.

Until 1948 Romania contained a large group of Greek Catholics, numbering about 1,500,000; but in that year, like their brothers and sisters in the Ukraine, they were forced to reunite with the Orthodox Church. Since 1990 they have re-emerged and sought to recover their church property, and as in the Ukraine there has been much tension and bitterness.

The *Church of Serbia* enjoyed under Communism less outward prosperity than the Romanian Church, but it maintained a much greater inner independence. The services are less well attended than in Romania, and in some areas there is a shortage of priests; but the number of students training for ordination is now considerably more than it was in the 1930s. There is a lack of monks but, as in Greece, a revival of monasticism for women. The Communists sought to weaken the Serbian Church by subdivision, and encouraged the foundation of a schismatic *Church of Macedonia* in 1967. This regards itself as autocephalous, but has not been recognized by any other Orthodox Church.

In the twentieth-century Serbian Church there have been countless martyrs. Some of these suffered at the hands of the Communists, but far more were killed during the Second World War by the infamous Fascist State of Croatia, under the Ustashi leader Ante Pavelich, who claimed the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church. In Croatia and the rest of Yugoslavia during the war years, out of the twenty-one Orthodox bishops, five were murdered, two died of beatings, two died in internment, five others were imprisoned or expelled from their dioceses; a quarter of the Orthodox priests were killed, and about one-half imprisoned. In Croatia half the Serbian population perished, and many Orthodox were forcibly 'converted' to Roman Catholicism at gunpoint. Memories of this were still vivid in the minds of the Serbs when an independent Croatia was once more set up in 1991 and began at once to take repressive measures against the Serbian Orthodox churches and clergy on its territory. But, to its credit, the Serbian hierarchy, led by the revered Patriarch Pavle (elected 1990), has condemned the atrocities committed by the invading Serbian armies and the Serbian irregulars in Croatia and Bosnia. The Serbian Church, so the Patriarch insisted on the day of Pentecost 1992, 'has never taught its people to seize the possessions of others and to kill in order to obtain them, but only to defend its own sanctuaries'.

In the four other Orthodox Churches formerly under Communist rule, relations with the State have been very similar to

those prevailing in Russia. Since the Communists came to power in 1944, the *Church of Bulgaria* has closely followed the policies of the Moscow Patriarchate. To judge from evidence in the early 1980s, church attendance in Bulgaria was a good deal worse than in Romania or Serbia. The monasteries were much depleted, although there were some women's communities with young nuns. With the re-establishment of freedom, a group of six Bulgarian bishops had the courage in July 1990 to issue a public act of repentance, seeking forgiveness for their failures and acts of compromise under the Communist regime; but the head of the Bulgarian Church, Patriarch Maksim (elected 1971), was not one of the six. With the demise of Communism, let us hope that forces of renewal will now emerge within Bulgarian Orthodoxy.

Another Church that was until recently closely dependent on Moscow is the ancient *Church of Georgia*. Founded in the early fourth century through the missionary witness of a woman, St Nina 'the equal of the Apostles', it was for a time under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Antioch; but it gained internal autonomy by the eighth century, and complete autocephaly around 1053. Incorporated into the Russian Church in 1811, it reasserted its independence in 1917. Its autocephaly was formally recognized by Moscow in 1943, and by Constantinople in 1990. Out of 2,455 churches functioning in Georgia in 1917, less than 100 were active in the 1980s; but with the coming of *glasnost* there has been a modest renewal. In 1992, besides the Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II (elected 1977), there were fourteen diocesan bishops.

The *Orthodox Church of Poland* was granted autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1924. In the inter-war period it numbered about four million, but with the alteration of frontiers in 1939 most of its members found themselves within the Soviet Union. In the 1930s it suffered much harassment from the Latin Catholic government of Pilsudski, and many churches were closed. Following the Communist takeover in 1948, the head of the Polish Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Dionysius, was deposed and put under house arrest, and the Orthodox Poles were forced to seek a new grant of autocephaly

from the Moscow Patriarchate, under whose control they largely remained until the 1980s. At the moment there are about 250 parishes, with 325 priests. From all accounts Orthodox Church life is expanding, and there is an active youth movement.

The *Orthodox Church of Czechoslovakia* has been closely linked with the Moscow Patriarchate since 1946. It was granted autocephaly by Moscow in 1951, but this has not yet been recognized by Constantinople. In the inter-war period, the leading Czech Orthodox was Bishop Gorazd, originally a Roman Catholic priest, who was consecrated as an Orthodox bishop in 1921, and killed by the Germans in 1942; he was proclaimed a saint in 1987. The numbers of Czechoslovak Orthodox were greatly increased in 1950, when the Greek Catholics in Slovakia, amounting to around 200,000, were forcibly reunited with Orthodoxy. But most of these new members were lost again when the Greek Catholic Church was re-established during the 'Prague spring' of 1968. Following the fall of Communism, the government handed back to the Catholics most of the church buildings that were being used by the Orthodox. Czechoslovak Orthodoxy is now struggling hard to build new places of worship.

For most Orthodox Christians in the twentieth century, Communism has been *the* enemy. But it is wise to remember that our enemy lies not only outside us but within. As Solzhenitsyn discovered in the prison camp, we should not simply project evil upon others, but we need to search our own hearts:

Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either – but right through every human heart – and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains . . . an unprootied small corner of evil.<sup>1</sup>

1. *The Gulag Archipelago*, vol. 2 (London 1975), part iv, p. 597.