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**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AS REFLECTED  
IN ORTHODOX AND ATHEIST PUBLICATIONS IN THE  
SOVIET UNION**

By Alf Johansen

Alf Johansen, a Lutheran pastor from Logstor, Denmark, is a specialist on the Orthodox Churches. He wrote the article on the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in OPREE Vol. 1, No. 7 (December, 1981). He wrote a book on the Russian Orthodox Church in Danish in 1950, and one entitled Theological Study in the Russian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches under Communist Rule (London: The Faith Press, 1963). In addition he has written a few articles on Romanian, Russian, and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies as well as articles in Diakonia. He has worked extensively with the typescripts of licentiates' and masters' theses of Russian Orthodox authors, unavailable to the general public.

A good deal of information can be gained on the Russian Orthodox Church and the religious situation in the U.S.S.R. by following sources, both Orthodox and atheist, published in the Soviet Union. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the most important writings reflecting on the state of Russian Orthodoxy since 1917 but with emphasis on the more recent period. The publications, both Orthodox and Marxist, are censored and therefore do not provide the full range of existing views. The Russian Orthodox Church has published since 1943 the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate and since 1959 Theological Works, both of small circulation. It is of interest to those outside the U.S.S.R. to see what themes scholars, theologians, and ideologues deal with and how they are approaching them, to see what seems of interest to them and what events or development they consider as crucial. The main goal of the author will be to survey this literature.

I. Party and State Policies concerning Religion.

The short-term policy of the Soviet state was to seek a satisfactory modus vivendi with the church. while the long-term policy

of the Communist Party was the annihilation of all religion by means of anti-religious propaganda and pressure.<sup>1</sup> Lenin wrote many articles on religion,<sup>2</sup> stating that "religion is a private affair in relations to the state, . . . but not in relations to the Party"<sup>3</sup> which must engage in atheistic propaganda (1909). Religion is the opium of the people who seek consolation in heaven thereby weakening the class struggle here on earth. Stalin spoke only once explicitly against religion, on September 9, 1927, saying that the Communist Party must carry on anti-religious propaganda against religious prejudices and through it liquidate reactionary clergy.<sup>4</sup> Stalin left the task of anti-religious propaganda to the "Godless movement" headed by Yaroslavskiy and therefore Stalin found it easier to reverse the policy in 1941.<sup>5</sup>

The congresses of the Communist Party frequently spoke out against religion. At the Tenth Congress in March 1921, it was asserted that one of the main tasks of the Party is anti-religious propaganda. At the Twelfth Congress in April 1923, the Party affirmed its work for the final liquidation of religious consciousness. At the Thirteenth Congress in May 1924, they decided to cease the administrative closing of churches. The Fifteenth congress in December 1927, concluded that there was a need for strengthening the struggle against religion on the ideological and cultural front. That trade unions too should increase their anti-religious propaganda was the conclusion of the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930. Yaroslavskiy's nearest collaborator admitted that the Seventeen Party Congress, in January 1934, passed no resolution on religion.<sup>6</sup>

The first Constitution of the R.S.F.S.R., of July, 1918, affirmed "freedom of religious and anti-religious propaganda." This was repeated in the Constitution of May 1925. This formulation was amended in the Constitution of May 1929, where only "the freedom of worship of religious cults and of anti-religious progaganda" was affirmed. This amendment was repeated by the Constitution of 1936.

The state legislates freedom while the Party sometimes demands a final liquidation of all religion. This distinction in principle was strengthened and transformed into practical politics when Stalin's modus vivendi with the Church, caused by the necessities of war, was changed

with Krushchev's anti-religious campaign of 1959-60. It is essential to emphasize this distinction between State and Party policies in order to understand the position of the Russian Orthodox Church. As the Party, however, determines the policies of the State, this distinction between policies of the State and the Party sounds to Westerners as a Soviet Communist paradox.

The history of the anti-religious movement runs as follows: The monthly Bezboznik [the Godless] was started in 1922, the newspaper Bezboznik in 1923. In 1926 the monthly Antireligioznik was added. In 1928 the League had 123,000 members, in 1930 two million, in 1932 5,673,000, in 1938 1,994,047, in 1940 2,992,038 and in 1941 about 3,500,000 members. The anti-religious movement grew substantially between 1937 and 1941 as the Central Committee of the Communist Party had stressed in 1936 the need for more intensive anti-religious work.<sup>7</sup> In the schools likewise anti-religious propaganda increased. In 1925, the State School Council issued a letter entitled "Non-religious Education in the Schools", while in 1929 the Commissariat of Education issued a letter on methods of anti-religious instructions in the schools.<sup>8</sup>

## II. Revolution, Patriarchate and Schisms

Prior to World War II the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed to publish in 1918 the "Acts and Decrees of the Local Council 1917-1918."<sup>9</sup> A few issues of the Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarhii [Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate] were published in the 1930s. Only since 1942 was the Russian Orthodox Church allowed to publish books. Before the war only the publications of the Renovationists, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (Karlovatski Sobor), the godless movement, Soviet newspapers, and Western books provided information about the Church. After the war two Russian theologians wrote from the perspective of the Moscow Patriarchate about the schisms which took place soon after the Bolshevik Revolution. In these manuscripts they also evaluated Patriarch Tikhon's (1917-25) actions; his anathema upon the Soviet power, his ban on delivering church treasures, his repentance and "Testaments,"--as well as the future Patriarch Sergiy's short membership in the church of the

Renovationists, his becoming Locum Tenens and his "Declaration of Loyalty to the Soviet Power" in 1927.

The left-wing schism, the so called "Renovationist" schism, was treated in a manuscript by Bishop Sergiy.<sup>9</sup> According to him, the leader of the Renovationists, A. J. Vvedenskiy, maintained that the reestablishment of the Patriarchate in 1917 was mainly a political act. Bishop Sergiy countered this by stating that the reestablishment of the Patriarchate caused a great religious upsurge in church life. The newly elected Patriarch Tikhon issued an anathema upon the Soviet power and called the faithful to oppose the Decree of January 23, 1918, "On the Separation of Church and State." Sergiy calls this anathema Tikhon's first mistake. Religious demonstrations which followed brought about rigorous responses from the Soviet government which regarded the church as a breeding place of counter-revolution. A positive outcome of this period, according to Bishop Sergiy, was the growing eucharistic movement. The intelligentsia, which previously distanced itself from the Church, was more drawn now to its spiritual life, perhaps influenced by the changes in society.

The Renovationists declared their political loyalty to the new Soviet power and used the famine in the country as a pretext to come to power. The bishops in the famine-stricken districts called upon the believers to hand over the sacred church treasures. This led the Soviet government to issue a decree on delivering church treasures. Reactionary elements in the church mobilized church members in order to create incidents in Moscow, Leningrad, Tula, Smolensk, Orel, and Astrakhan. The result was that some bishops and many priests and active lay people were accused and sentenced, which further sharpened an open enmity between church and state. Patriarch Tikhon made a second mistake when on February 22, 1922, he prohibited believers from handing over sacred treasures. This led to his arrest. Vvedenskiy then asserted that Tikhon, during his arrest, handed over the church government to the Renovationists until the arrival of Metropolitan Agafangel. Tikhon denied this in a letter to the Serbian Patriarch dated November 14, 1923, since the power of bishops cannot be transferred to priests. In a message to the believers, Bishop Alexis Simanskiy, the future patriarch, permitted

Vvedenskiy to serve in the churches in the diocese of Petrograd (later Leningrad) under certain conditions. This act hurt the Church and gave the Renovationists the chance of being rehabilitated in their destructive work. Nevertheless, even this decree may be regarded as a patriotic act aimed at saving the peace in the Church since Alexis had realized by June 24, 1922, that it was impossible for him to govern the diocese of Petrograd.

While many parish priests and sometimes even bishops changed their orientation rather easily, the believing masses met the ideas of the Renovationists with open hostility. Metropolitan Agafangel was placed on a church trial while Metropolitan Venyamin of Petrograd was condemned by a Soviet tribunal and executed. In August 1922, the all-Russian Conference of Renovationists permitted married priests to become bishops, contrary to Orthodox tradition, which led Metropolitan Sergiy, the future patriarch, to leave the Renovationists after having joined them briefly, on account of their "complete contempt of church canons." The churches served by the Renovationist priests became empty. That led the Renovationists, assisted by the police, to take over patriarchal churches. Believers then left those churches, too, with tears and in pain. The churches were then closed and taken over by the state as "superfluous."

In April 1923, the Local Council of Renovationists in Moscow stripped Patriarch Tikhon of his dignity as patriarch and monk. But in June 1923, Patriarch Tikhon was released from prison after he confessed his guilt to the Soviet power. On July 1923, Tikhon sent an appeal to the Orthodox bishops, priests, and believers in which he repented of his anti-Soviet actions in opposing the Soviet decree on delivering of church treasures and the peace negotiations at Brest in 1918. He now expressed his sincere loyalty to the Soviet power.

The government permitted only the Renovationists to correspond with churches abroad and thereby they succeeded in having their church government acknowledged by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople as canonical. Patriarch Tikhon died on April 7, 1925, and on the same date published his so-called "Testament" in which he said that the Soviet power has given the Orthodox Church the possibility to conduct its

religious work in agreement with the demands of its faith and that he had made no compromises in regard to the faith. On October 1, 1925, the Renovatoinist's Second Local Council met in Moscow, at which Vvedenskiy accused Tikhon of opposing the Soviet power until his death. But the Renovatoinists continued to decline in numbers and by the beginning of 1941 they almost totally disappeared.<sup>10</sup>

The right-wing schisms were treated in a thesis for the degree of Master of Theology by the future bishop of Kuybishev, Ioann Snychev.<sup>11</sup> According to this thesis the Local Council of 1917/18 accepted a resolution on January 23, 1918, which empowered the patriarch to appoint several candidates for the post of Locum Tenens in case of his absence. On December 25, 1924, Patriarch Tikhon appointed Metropolitan Kiril, Metropolitan Agafangel, and Metropolitan Peter for this post. After the death of Tikhon, Peter became Locum Tenens since Kiril and Agafangel were "prevented" by the authorities. Peter was confirmed in this position by thirty-seven bishops who attended Tikhon's burial.<sup>12</sup> On December 6, 1925, Peter appointed Metropolitan Sergiy, Metropolitan Mikhail, and Archbishop Iosif of Rostov. As Peter was arrested, Sergiy became Suffragan Locum Tenens, but was not recognized immediately as Peter was. In the opinion of Ioann Snychev, Sergiy's position was canonical since there was no possibility of convening the Local Council.

The Grigorianskiy schism came about as follows: Archbishop Grigoriy Yakovskiy preferred a synodal administration to the patriarchal one and formed on December 9, 1925, along with nine other bishops, the Provisional Higher Church Council, which was recognized by the Soviet government on January 2, 1926.<sup>13</sup> Sergiy was prohibited from leaving the Nizhegorod monastery, but in spite of that, being supported by twenty-four bishops he deprived the Grigorianskiy bishops of their dioceses and prohibited their services. This prohibition was confirmed by Metropolitan Peter on June 9, 1926, though he had formerly transferred the church government to the Grigorianskiy Council. This schism was finally terminated in 1943.

Another schism on the right was the Yaroslavskiy schism. When Metropolitan Agafangel returned to his diocese in Yaroslavl in April, 1926, after an absence of four years, he took over the church government

according to Tikhon's testamentary order of December 25, 1924. Sergiy, however, turned Agafangel over to the judgment of twenty-four bishops who were in Moscow at the time on May 11, 1926. On June 8, Agafangel gave in, in order to save the peace in the church, but resumed his claims after Sergiy declared his loyalty to the Soviet regime on July 16, 1927. He was later reconciled with Sergiy after negotiations.

Still another schism was the Iosiflianskiy schism. Many clergy found that a legal relationship to the anti-religious power might endanger the true faith. Sergiy preferred, however, a purely legal connection to the atheistic state over against the massive suffering of the church. The majority of the members of the Patriarchal Church were not ready for such a step. Iosif became bishop of Rostov in 1921 and Metropolitan of Leningrad in 1926. Sergiy and the Holy Synod, both recognized by the government on May 18, 1927, transferred Iosif to be the Metropolitan of Odessa on September 12, 1927. According to church canons Sergiy had the full right to do this. On January 24, 1928, Iosif broke off relations. The schism lasted till 1930. The majority of the priests and bishops remained loyal to Sergiy to prevent further schisms.

A modus vivendi between church and state was not possible as long as Patriarch Tikhon and Lenin represented the church and state. On the contrary there was a severe struggle. Only during the Stalin period was Sergiy's Holy Synod recognized by the government. However, in spite of Sergiy's Declaration of Loyalty on July 1927 the government did not seem to trust Sergiy.

These two typescripts cover the period from 1917 to 1930. The period from 1930 to 1941 does not seem to be covered in the Russian Orthodox theses.<sup>14</sup> One can, therefore, only refer to the "religious persecutions", mentioned by many Western observers, the first one in 1922/23 concerning the handing over of sacred treasures, the second one in 1929/30 connected with the industrialization and agricultural collectivization, and the third one in 1937/38 connected with the Moscow Trials and charges of espionage. The Moscow Patriarchate never officially admitted that such religious persecutions took place.



### III. Stalin's Modus Vivendi with the Church

#### 1. During the War

Germany attacked the U.S.S.R. on June 22, 1941. On that day, Metropolitan Sergiy sent a message to "the Orthodox to defend the holy frontiers of the native country."<sup>15</sup> The periodicals Bezboznik and Antireligioznik ceased to be published by September 1941 (or perhaps already during the last days of June). Now the church was allowed to publish The Truth on Religion in Russia in 1942 and The Russian Orthodox Church and the Great Patriotic War in 1943. This change in regard to the godless movement and the Church was caused by the Nazi "crusade" against the godless Bolsheviks. The ancient nationalism of the Orthodox Church now became very suitable at home and in the occupied territories. Thus, for instance, Soviet planes dropped church messages with Biblical passages behind German occupied lines. The Soviet Press Department in London declared on August 22, 1941, that there are 4,225 churches, thirty-seven monasteries, and 5,665 Orthodox priests.<sup>16</sup> On September 4, 1943, Stalin received Metropolitan Sergiy and stated that the government no longer objected against a Sobor which would choose a patriarch and a Holy Synod.<sup>17</sup> On September 8, Sergiy was elected Patriarch.<sup>18</sup> Then in October 1943, the government established a Council for Affairs of the Orthodox Church and Karpov became president. On November 24, 1944, Karpov declared the government's relations with the church changed as the government perceived a change in the church's attitude in the past decade and particularly during the War.<sup>19</sup> The Dimitriy Donskoy Tank Column of about 40-50 large tanks was paid by church funds and was delivered on March 7, 1944, to the Red Army.<sup>20</sup> The government allowed the opening of a Theological Institute and Theological Course in Moscow, on June 14, 1944. This was perhaps to offset some of the German propaganda advances when the Germans allowed many churches to reopen in the occupied territory and there was a resurgence of religious life in these areas.<sup>21</sup>

Patriarch Sergiy died in May 1944, and Metropolitan Alexiy of Leningrad was elected as Patriarch by the Local Council on February 2, 1945. At this council, unlike the Council of 1917/18, only the bishops had the right to vote and the Council was recognized by the government.

Almost all national Orthodox Churches were represented. The Council passed a new regulation on the Administration of the Church,<sup>22</sup> which omitted those sections of the 1917/1918 Regulations dealing with Patriarchal responsibility before the Council. In addition, the Soviet legislation of April 1929 on Religious Associations was added. The Parish Association was to be represented by twenty believers. It received from the civil authority a church building and this property was entrusted to an executive organ consisting of three persons and the priest. This means that the hierarchical structure of the Orthodox Church was recognized by the government while the former Soviet legislation only mentioned religious associations. A circular letter of August 25, 1922, said that the Orthodox Church could not be registered, but only the religious association. A circular of July 10, 1920, said that only these associations had the right to nominate priests and that no bishop had the right to give order to the associations. A circular of August 24, 1918, mentioned the twenty members of the associations.<sup>23</sup> All this was repeated in the Decree of April, 1929. On April 10, 1945, the newly elected Patriarch Alexiy was received by Stalin. They talked about the proposal to add eight new theological courses and about the Patriarch's impending trip to the Near East.<sup>24</sup> Stalin's two receptions of the church leaders were reported in the government's newspaper Izvestiya and repeated in the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate.

## 2. After the War

The Patriarchate took part in many peace conferences after the war.<sup>25</sup> It tried to persuade Russian emigrants to submit to the Moscow rather than the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. It also sought close contact with European Orthodox Churches. In 1946 at a council in L'vov some five million Uniates renounced the papacy and were received by the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>26</sup> The Vatican rejected the validity of this act charging that four of the Uniate bishops had been arrested. The Moscow "Conference of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches" in July 1948 attacked the Vatican dogmas on papal primacy and the "filioque clause" in the creed. In addition, this Conference accused the Vatican of collaboration with Hitler and later with the U.S.A. It did not

acknowledge Anglican Orders and charged the Ecumenical Movement with having abandoned the dogmatic basis for the reunion of churches and being dominated by the U.S.A.<sup>27</sup>

Karpov stated that his Council for the Affairs of the Orthodox Church permitted the opening of 837 churches during the years 1944-46. The Sergius Trinity Monastery was reopened in April 1946. Stalin's cooperation with the Church continued till his death in March 1953, in order to facilitate the rebuilding of the country. Anti-religious propaganda was at a lower level till July 1954. The Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge was formed on July 19, 1947, and took over the publication of the periodical Nauka i Zhizn [Science and Life] in January 1948. No severe anti-religious propaganda appeared on its pages. The explicitly anti-religious articles appeared infrequently, none in 1947 and 1948, one in 1949, four in 1950, two in 1951, none in 1952 and 1953 and four in 1954. Similar patterns can be discerned in Kommunist, Molodoi Kommunist, and in the Komsomolskaya Pravda.

#### IV. Krushchev's Anti-religious Campaign

After Stalin's death, Nikita Krushchev became First Secretary of the Communist Party in 1953. Now the war and the immediate results of the war were over and the Party could again concentrate on ideological problems. The Party newspaper Pravda started a new antireligious campaign on July 24, 1954. Komsomolskaya Pravda carried thirteen anti-religious articles in a short span of time. The period of intense propaganda ended on November 11, 1954, with a resolution of the Party's Central Committee, signed by Krushchev, warning against administrative measures and calling for a return to Lenin's formulation of regarding "religion as a private affair in relations to the state, . . . but not in relations to the Party." While the resolution perhaps intended the intensification of anti-religious propaganda, in reality, such propaganda weakened. Nevertheless, the membership of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge increased from 59,000 in 1947 to 340,000 in 1956.<sup>28</sup>

The years 1955-58 were milder years. New churches were being

consecrated, seven in 1956 and ten in 1958. In 1956 the Bible was, perhaps for the first time after the Revolution, being published in Russian. In September 1957 the large Trinity Cathedral in Leningrad was reopened. By August 1957 the president of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, Mitin, admitted that in many places the number of churchgoers had doubled and that many young Komsomols "openly confessed their religious feelings."<sup>29</sup> The Party's periodical, Kommunist, wrote that the majority of the children in the country districts around Moscow were being baptized and definitively in larger numbers than thirty years ago.<sup>30</sup> In 1958 a publication, The Russian Orthodox Church: Organization, Situation, Activity was published in Russian, English, and other languages. In it there was still the claim that there were two theological academies (Moscow and Leningrad), and eight theological seminaries (Moscow, Leningrad, Minsk, Kiev, Saratov, Stavropol, Odessa, and Lutsk).<sup>31</sup>

When Krushchev attacked Stalin's practices at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 and led the process of de-Stalinization, he also "de-Stalinized" Stalin's pact of 1943 with the church leaders.<sup>32</sup> Krushchev also became prime minister in 1958 and started a new anti-religious campaign in 1959/60. The periodical Kommunist called Stalin's milder post-1941 policy "a violation of Lenin's legislation on religion."<sup>33</sup> In October 1959, this writer was received by the vice-president of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, Mrs. Dubrovina, who presented the writer with the first issue of a new, truly anti-religious monthly, entitled Nauka i religiya [Science and Religion] of September 1959. She mentioned the intensification of anti-religious propaganda in the Baltic republics and Western White Russia.

Already in 1957 a former Orthodox priest, Ev. Duluman, published a pamphlet, Why I Ceased to Believe in God. Likewise, Science and Life published, in July 1959, an anti-religious article by a former priest, Darmanskiy. In October 1959 this writer heard an uninteresting lecture at the Leningrad Theological Academy by Professor Aleksandr Osipov on the Old Testament and had conversations with him. Osipov wrote in the December 6, 1959, issue of Pravda why he left the Church and the

Christian faith. On December 30, 1959, Osipov, Darmanskiy and Duluman were excommunicated by the Patriarch and the Holy Synod.<sup>34</sup> Osipov was given by the state a place of honor in the Museum of the History of Religion housed in the former Kazanskiy Sobor (church) in Leningrad. In the 1960's he increased his anti-religious activity, publishing in 1963 a "Catechism without Embellishment" attacking the Lord's Prayer. Metropolitan Nikolay Krutiskiy was replaced on September 15, 1960, by Archbishop Nikodim as the head of the church office for Foreign Relations, officially due to illness. The Roman Catholic author Johanness Chrysostomus wrote, however, that Nikolay was held responsible for the excommunication of Osipov for accepting the Party's atheism.<sup>35</sup> Nikolay had been very popular among the believers, yet the Western press tended to label him a Russian spy during the Korean war. He died in a Moscow hospital in 1961 and Nikita Struve reported that Russian believers in Moscow thought that he "had died as a martyr."<sup>36</sup>

There were also some internal changes in the Russian Orthodox Church in this period. On July 18, 1961, the Council of Bishops passed some changes in the "Regulations on the Administration of the Russian Orthodox Church" which had originally been passed on January 31, 1945. The priests became exempted from being members of the executive organs which were in charge of the church property, because the Council for Affairs of the Russian Orthodox church<sup>37</sup> stated that the 1945 regulations were not in accordance with Soviet legislation on cults (presumably the Decree on Religious Associations of April 8, 1929). Only three bishops protested this change. The Council also passed a resolution to join the World Council of Churches. This was actually accomplished the same year at the Assembly in New Delhi. The time of political coexistence had made such a move possible. It may also have been this Council of Bishops which decreed that all baptisms had to be registered and that parents must either attend the baptism or at least send their domestic passports. That rule tended to drastically reduce the number of baptisms. Prior to 1961 this author witnessed in the course of an hour on a given Sunday in the Nikolskiy Sobor in Leningrad as many as one hundred baptisms; after 1961 only about twenty in the corresponding period, but about 1966 he counted forty-five in the same period.

At the Twenty-second Congress of the CPSU in 1961, Krushchev emphasized the need for atheistic education which would "prevent religious views, especially among children and youth." Of the eight theological seminaries which opened just after the war only five were still operating in 1961<sup>38</sup> and by 1965 only three--Zagorsk, Leningrad, and Odessa--were left.<sup>39</sup> Many churches were being closed but the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate did not report this. Western scholars found other Soviet sources providing information on the closing of churches. Nikita Struve cited Questions Concerning the History of Religion and Atheism (Moscow 1963) that the number of churches declined from 20,000 to 11,500 by 1962, while B. Spuler using The Handbook for the Propagandist and Agitator stated that it had decreased from 24,000 in 1952 to 21,000 in 1961 and to 7,500 in 1966.<sup>40</sup> The numbers seem to vary and cannot be verified. The years from 1960 to 1964 are regarded by the most Western observers as the fourth period of religious persecutions. It is interesting that most bishops who were being appointed were quite young, mostly in their 30s and 40s. This happened for two reasons. The church found them more able to deal with existing difficulties while the state found them more ready to negotiate as they knew the government procedures better.

Anti-religious propaganda assumed more naive and aggressive forms during the period 1960-64 especially in the new journal, Science and Religion. For instance, a ridiculing cartoon shows a god-father and his god-son sitting on a cloud being terrified by the Sputniks whizzing around them. As a result the god-father begins reading a Soviet physics textbook and the god-son picks up a Russian alphabet book.<sup>41</sup> Individual church leaders often became targets of press attacks. Bishop Job was accused of having met the Nazis as liberators and having evaded 800,000 rubles in taxes.<sup>42</sup> Mihail, the Principal of the Stavropol Seminary, was accused of having worked for the Nazis and owning a Volga car.<sup>43</sup> Bishop Sergiy Larin was accused of having appropriated 750,000 rubles from the Tula diocese.<sup>44</sup> The theologian, Vadim Syavrov, was chided for producing typewritten booklets on religion and science yet being a skirtchaser and a charlatan.<sup>45</sup> The Soviet Academy of Science publication, Voprosy

Filozofii [Problems of Philosophy] contained a long article on religious survivals in its March 1961 issue. It maintained that during the war a segment of the workers turned to religion and they revived their religious prejudices after the war due to efforts of religious activists.

Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests and the preachers of various sects have some success among the youth, especially as they try to reconcile religion with science and modernize their religious ideology. Religion is most successful among collective farmers and women home-makers. Religion has survived particularly well in the new territories, namely Moldavia, Western Ukraine, Western White Russia, and the Baltic republics (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). Since the religious activists approach many individuals, so should anti-religious propagandists approach not only individual non-believers but also individual believers. The Stavropol Theological Seminary was supposedly closed on account of successful anti-religious propaganda, but two of its former students who were transferred to the Leningrad Seminary informed this writer that the seminary was closed by a government administrative order.

#### V. The Brezhnev Era

Leonid Brezhnev, after assuming the position of First Secretary of the CPSU in 1964, did not deliver any specific statement on religion. Some Western reports informed that 300 churches had been reopened in 1965 in the middle of Russia. Two Orthodox priests, Nikolay Eshliman and Gleb Yakunin complained on December 15, 1965, to the President of the U.S.S.R., Nikolay Podgorniy, that at least 10,000 churches had been closed in the past, that the demand of the parents' inland passports for their children's baptism intimidated parents, that the state interfered with the appointment of priests, and they protested the prohibition against children attending worship services.<sup>46</sup> These two priests were dismissed from the priesthood in May 1966.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Alexander Solzhenitsyn complained in his "Lenten Letter" of 1972 to Patriarch Pimen in regard to the same points, namely, parental passports for their children's baptism and prohibition of

children from attending worship services. He added two additional points, the dismissal of Yakunin and Eshliman and the prohibition of church ceremonies outside the church building.<sup>48</sup> Yakunin complained to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi in November and December 1975 that believers were being sent to mental hospitals and that no Bibles were available.<sup>49</sup>

The official leaders of the church tried to explain the problems. Metropolitan Yuvenaliy of the Department of External Church Relations, did not deny the church's difficulties to the WCC Assembly but felt that the information was "exaggerated and often twisted."<sup>50</sup> Archbishop Pitirim, the editor of the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate wrote that "religious instruction of underage children promotes prejudices."<sup>51</sup> He also declared in 1977 that no one prevents the churches from publishing religious literature,<sup>52</sup> and that there was no wave of imprisonment of priests.<sup>53</sup>

Anti-religious propoganda was especially directed against the Ukraine, White Pussia, and the Baltic republics, yet Science and Religion did not attack any clergy by name between 1969 and 1974. On the contrary, Professors Borovoy and Zabolotskiy and Metropolitan Nikodim were commended for their recognition of the Soviet economic progress. Kuroyedov, the president of the State Council for Religious Affairs stated in a small pamphlet containing Soviet legislation in regard to religion that "the church is not allowed to work especially among children, religious instruction of children must only be performed . . . in the family and by parents."<sup>54</sup>

Another Marxist, P. Kurotskin, wrote six articles on the "Development of Contemporary Orthodoxy." According to these articles, Metropolitan Nikodim, Filaret, and Aleksiy, and the Bishops Yuvenaliy and Pitirim work seriously for political renewal, but their ideological adaptation is merely tactical. The church opposition as expressed by Archbishop Germogen and priests Eshliman and Yakunin will hurt the normalization of state-church relations. Nikodim, Borovoy, and Zabolotskiy have begun "the social interpretation of the Orthodox teachings" but fundamentally Christianity is antisocial. Anti-religious propoganda has sometimes regretfully slackened its work, complained



Kurotskin, since the church seems to have become loyal and is working for peace. But the ideological renewal of the church makes it much more dangerous than the old, rigid form of religiosity.

Between 1975 and 1979 most of the articles in Science and Religion were objective in tone, but several articles attacked religion for consoling and calming "slaves" and drawing people away from the class struggle. The authors admitted that since 1960, Orthodox theology tried to reconcile Christian ideals with Soviet social ethics, especially in regard to collective ownership. In 1980 and 1981 some of the "extreme" religious groups were attacked, namely the non-registered Baptists, some Adventists and Pentecostals. In 1982 Kuroyedov stated in the October issue that the Russian Orthodox church had 64 dioceses in the U.S.S.R. and 12 abroad.

In 1974-75 a report stating that the Holy Synod debates all important issues with the Council for Religious Affairs. This report was allegedly sent secretly out of the U.S.S.R. and has been attributed to V. Furov, Vice-President of the Council. It was written as the annual report for 1974-75, was translated from Russian and appeared in many Western publications.<sup>55</sup> According to Furov the fifty-eight bishops can be categorized into three groups:

1. Those who realize that the State does not want the Church to increase its influence and who make no special efforts in that direction. Among them are named Patriarch Pimen, Metropolitan Aleksiy of Tallin, and Archbishop Pitirim.
2. Those who are loyal towards the State and observe the laws of the cults, but try to activate believers and priests. Among them are Metropolitans Nikodim of Leningrad, and Ioann (Wendland) of Yaroslavl.
3. Those who try to evade the laws of the cults, such as bishops Mikhail of Astrakhan and Chrysostom of Kursk.

The report states that the Council is "only interested in political aspects" of the bishops' relation to Soviet policy and law. Patriarch, Pimen, however, believes that social problems must not overshadow the idea of redemption. Metropolitan Nikodim led believing youth away from political problems. Bishop Chrysostom complained that forty churches in

his diocese were closed because theological schools admit too few students while Bishop Mikhail complained about some of the decisions of the Council of Bishops of July 1961. Some priests performed religious services unlawfully and collected money for the church--in private houses. According to the report there were 8,252 Orthodox priests in 1961, 6,694 in 1967, 6,234 in 1971; and only 5,994 in 1974. There were 7,062 registered Orthodox churches on January 1, 1975. Furov, found the church, however, "very alive" and supported by the believers and clergy. The priests are able to educate believers and make religious propaganda among non-believing relatives during private services for the dead. The number of students in the three theological seminaries are: class one, 108, class two, 102, class three, 107, class four, 91, and in the two theological academies, class one, 48, class two, 45, class three, 35, class four, 30. In addition, there are corresponding students who live at home; 302 are in Moscow Seminary and 159 are in the Moscow Academy in Zagorsk.

The report states that local plenipotentiaries of the Council make sure that no "fanatics, extremists, and insane persons" are admitted to the seminaries and they arrange patriotic lectures at the seminaries. Both academies follow mainly church interests; they speak out against mysticism but in fact spread it. On July 29, 1974, the Council decided to increase its control over theological schools in order to reduce their activities.

Finally, Furov stated that the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate is printed in 15,000 Russian Language copies and 3,000 English language copies.<sup>56</sup> Both are censored by the Council and reach very few believers on account of the small circulation. The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate attempts to project religion as a progressive social force and to promote the eucharist and penance.

#### VI. Topics Treated by Orthodox Authors

Peace is one of the most prominent themes in Orthodox periodicals. The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate often reports and occasionally evaluates many peace conferences as well as ecumenical gatherings, such as those of the WCC and the Second Vatican Council. For instance, the

Vatican II decree on Ecumenism was discussed. Professor Voronov spoke on confessionalism and ecumenism and the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the other confessions, while Metropolitan Nikodim spoke at the WCC assembly at Uppsala on the Russian Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement.<sup>57</sup> Nikodim's election to the Presidency of the WCC was, of course, reported. Among the peace conferences which were reported on were one in Zagorsk in July 1969, and the World Conference of Religious Workers for Lasting Peace, Disarmament, and Just Relations Among Nations in Moscow, 1977.

Also frequently reported were the various Russian Orthodox bilateral theological conversations, such as the series of seven with the West German Evangelical Church. There were also four conversations with the East German Evangelical Churches, five with the Finnish Lutheran Church, five with the Roman Catholic Church, and two with the Episcopalian Church in the U.S.A. Occasionally there are also articles on such trends as the theology of revolution.

Developments within the Orthodox Communion and especially in the Russian Orthodox Church are, of course, also reported on in the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate. Thus, for instance, there is an article on the history of "The Russian Orthodox Church from 1917 to 1967."<sup>58</sup> The autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America was also debated, its recognition by the Russian Orthodox Church, the death of Patriarch Alexiy and the election of Patriarch Pimen, the Russian publication of the Bible in 1970, 1976, and 1979 (without mentioning the number of copies), and the commemorations of the deaths of various high church officials are among the reported.

There is also another publication called Teologicheski Trudy [Theological Works] which, between 1959 and 1981, contains a collection of articles in its twenty-two issues. No histories of the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union can be found in them, but the reports of the various bilateral dialogues are included. Also, in it are many summaries of theses for the degree of Master of Theology, such as Voronov's work on Anglican orders, Zabolotskiy's on Catholicity as the problem of ecumenism, Bishop Mikhail's on Orthodox teaching on personal salvation, Metropolitan Nikodim's on John XXIII, and Archbishop Vladimir's (of Tula

and Belev who is also the Principal of the Moscow Theological Academy) on Russian Orthodox ecclesiology and the ecumenical movement.

It should be stated that none of the theses or dissertations or theological textbooks are printed; they are all typewritten. In 1962 this author read through the textbooks used at the Leningrad Theological Academy.<sup>59</sup> There were textbooks on dogmatics by Mirolyubov, on ethics by Matveev, on the history of fundamental theology by Sborovsky, homiletics by Gnedich and Vetelev, on ascetics by Stoikov, on Western confessions by Kupressov, and on the ecumenical movement by Borovoy.

Here are some basic thoughts from the text on Dogmatics. Mirolyubov maintains that it "is impossible to prove the non-existence of God." The image of God is perverted but not annihilated in human beings and needs to be recreated by God in the human being. God needs both to forgive sin and cleanse the person from sin. But it was up to human nature to conquer sin and therefore Jesus Christ had to take upon himself human nature. Human freedom and God's grace act together in organic unity and interdependence. Justification is sanctification and is accomplished only through faith, but good works are necessary in an equal degree, without any right for reward. Both on earth and in heaven church members are living in a process of gaining holiness. Human beings must belong to the church in order to be saved. When venerating saints people venerate God who helped the saints become saintly. Christ, however, is the only mediator. The veneration of icons is based on the incarnation. By its essence, but not in its form, the sacrifice of the eucharist is identical to the sacrifice on the cross. "We believe in the Church, although it is visible, because God's grace which dwells in it is invisible." "At the present Eastern and Western Churches should be brought together in order to . . . resist unbelief with a common front." "The main task of ecclesiology is . . . to strengthen what unites all Christian Churches: Christian love and brotherhood in the name of Christ."

The textbook on ethics is divided, like the one on dogmatics, into the chapters on the fall and on salvation. "Objective" salvation means that the fruits of redemption are not dependent on humans. "Subjective" salvation means the appropriation of these fruits by human free will.

Regeneration means justification and sanctification in the sacraments or mysteries of baptism and chrismation. "Works justify the person, but not like faith which stands higher than works. Penitent faith, as the whole process of conversion, is the gift of the grace of God." A person is justified by the action of the grace of the Holy Spirit and not by one's own merits. Salvation is not a reward for good works. Love is the true Christian motive for moral life.

Since 1962 this author frequently visited the Leningrad Theological Academy and had the opportunity to read theses for the Master's Degree and Licentiate in Theology. Some of these have been described in the author's two articles in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies.<sup>60</sup> The themes of these theses vary. There are, for instance, theses on the Vatican Council, on the Old Catholic Church, on Catholicity and Ecumenism, on Pope John XXIII, on Personal Salvation and other topics. It is unfortunate that there is so little access to these theological works both inside and outside the Soviet Union.

A very important dogmatic thesis is P.V. Gnedich's "The Dogma of Redemption."<sup>61</sup> Gnedich states that redemption to Orthodoxy means the restoration and cleansing of the nature of fallen humans, while to Catholicism it is satisfaction of God's justice. God is love according to God's nature and all of God's virtues reveal love. Therefore, one must not oppose God's justice to God's love. Redemption does not mean the change of God's relations and reconciliation with us. Redemption was directed not toward God who is unchangeable and cannot be influenced from without, but toward human beings who can be reborn.

The right teaching on God veers away from the legal theory of redemption which often understands the antropomorphic expressions about God's anger, enmity and reward toward man in a literal way. We know, however, only God's virtues from God's actions. God is in the same way good, both in showing mercy and in punishing. The legal theory tries to penetrate into the inner nature of God which is impossible and makes God changeable.

The right teaching on human beings states all evil comes from human freedom and not from God. It interprets redemption from the teaching on God's love and human freedom. God will not limit human freedom which is

a characteristic of God's image and this constitutes the essential difference between Orthodox theology and other confessions.

## VII. Conclusion

In spite of intense study since 1942 and twelve visits since 1952 this writer does not feel competent to really evaluate Russian Orthodox Church life before, during and after World War II. Many churches were reopened during the war and again closed during the years 1960-64. Some Western sources wrote about the reopening of 300 churches in 1965, while the Furov report wrote about the closing of some churches and especially about the decrease in the number of Orthodox priests. If this report is a genuine governmental document it provides more exact figures than any other document.

Party policy on the liquidation of religious consciousness has not succeeded. On the contrary, there seems to be an increasing religious interest among a part of the youth. As West European youth becomes indifferent to the established religion, Soviet youth becomes indifferent to the established atheism.

Stalin's modus vivendi with the church was a necessary policy during the war, but not in the Brezhnev Era. The accommodation which took place during the war was already brought to an end after 1959/60. Nevertheless the state does not want to create an "underground" church beyond its control. And the church is useful in supporting Soviet foreign policy.

Some Western scholars specialize in non-registered confessions and denounce most Russian Orthodox Church leaders as Soviet spies and functionaries. Some of them may be agents, but this writer trusts the very large majority. They do not make compromises with the state in order to save their own position, but to save their church which with its seven sacraments cannot live without open churches.

The two Russian bishops, Metropolitans Nikolay and Nikodim, who have been most frequently denounced by a part of the Western press since they were leaders of the Department of External Church Relations from 1944 to 1977 were, at their deaths, both considered by the common church people to be true believers. This writer saw the enormous crowd of

common believers attending the requiem (Russian: panihida) which was celebrated at the large Trinity Cathedral in Leningrad forty days after Nikodim's death at a papal audience in Rome. The periodical Science and Religion, representing the Party's ideological aspects, saw the Orthodox church leaders in a similar light, namely true to the interests of their Church.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>John S. Curtiss, The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917-50 (Boston, 1953), p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>V.I. Lenin, On Religion (New York: Little Lenin Library, vol. 7, 1933), 48 pp.

<sup>3</sup>Yaroslavskiy, On Religion (Moscow, 1957), pp. 640. Mostly speeches and articles. A chapter: "Lenin's Thoughts on Religion," pp. 46-99. See p. 61.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Stalin, Fragen des Leninismus (Moscow, 1938), 836 pp. This statement was deleted in the Russian eleventh edition (Moscow, 1945).

<sup>5</sup>See also Yaroslavskiy, The Bible for Believers and Non-Believers (Moscow, 1959), 408 pp., mostly on the Pentateuch.

<sup>6</sup>See for instance Organization and Methodology of Antireligious Work (Moscow, 1934).

<sup>7</sup>Curtiss, op cit., pp. 237, 267, and 279.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 213-214.

<sup>9</sup>A. Wuyts, Le Patriarchat Russe au concile de Moscou de 1917-1918 (Rome, 1941), 244 pp., in Orientalia Christiana Analecta, p. 129.

<sup>9A</sup>Bishop Sergiy, The Schism of the Renovationists (Astrakhan-Moscow, typewritten manuscript, 1953-1959), 769 pp.

<sup>10</sup>Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate (hereafter abbreviated to JMP), issues 1943/1944 included accounts of three repenting Renovators.

<sup>11</sup>Archimandrit Ioann, The Church Schisms of the Twenties and Thirties of the Twentieth Century (Kuybishev, typewritten manuscript, 1966), 314 pp.

<sup>12</sup>Johannes Chrysostomus, Kirchengeschichte Russlands der neuesten Zeit (München, 1966), II, p. 28, maintains there were 58 bishops.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. Provides a great deal more information about the Soviet government's role.

<sup>14</sup>Alf Johansen, Theological Study in the Russian and Bulgarian-Orthodox Churches under Communist Rule (London: Faith Press, 1963), 59 pp.

<sup>15</sup>The Truth on Religion in Russia (Swedish translation), p. 18.

<sup>16</sup>S. Evans, The Churches in the U.S.S.R. (London, 1943), p. 88.

<sup>17</sup>JMP, 1943, 1, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup>JMP, 1943, 1, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>JMP, 1944, 12, pp. 18f.

<sup>20</sup>JMP, 1944, 4, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup>In the 1950s this writer visited the only two churches in Sverdlovsk (1964: 897,000 inhabitants) and nine of the fifteen churches in Leningrad (1964: 3,607,000 inhabitants), all of them during worship services. He also visited Kiev and Odessa and was told that there were 30 churches in Kiev (1964: 1,292,000) and 24 in Odessa (1964: 721,000). These visits and this information may perhaps confirm the usual Western statement that there were more open churches during the war in the occupied than in the non-occupied territories.

<sup>22</sup>The Orthodox Calendar for the Year 1946, Moscow, pp. 58-60.

<sup>23</sup>La Legislation Sovietique contre la Religion (Roma, 1925), in Orientalia Christiana, Vol. V. A French translation of Gidulyanov, Separation of the Church from the State, first edition (Moscow, 1923), p. 79 and pp. 83f.

<sup>24</sup>JMP, 1945, 5, p. 3.



<sup>25</sup> Conference in Defence of Peace of All Churches and Religious Associations in the U.S.S.R., held in Zagorsk in May 1952.

<sup>26</sup> Curtiss, op cit., p. 307.

<sup>27</sup> Acts of the Conference of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches (Moscow, 1949), Vol. I, 447 pp., Vol. II, 463 pp. Translated into French, Vol. I in 1950 and Vol. II in 1952.

<sup>28</sup> Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift (Bern), (hereafter IKZ), 1957, 3, p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> Chrysostomus, op cit., Vol. III, p. 251.

<sup>30</sup> IKZ, 1961, 1, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> 230 pp. with many photos.

<sup>32</sup> Ernst Suttner, "50 Jahre rumänisches Patriarchat" in Ostkirchliche Studien (Würzburg), 1976, p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> IKZ, 1964, 3, p. 131. (Kommunist quoted without mentioning date and year).

<sup>34</sup> JMP, 1960, 2, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Chrysostomus, op cit., III, p. 252.

<sup>36</sup> Nikita Struve, Les Chretiens en U.S.S.R. (Paris, 1963), p. 274.

<sup>37</sup> The Council for Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church was changed to The Council for Religious Affairs.

<sup>38</sup> JMP, 1961, 5, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> JMP, 1965, 4, p. 47.

<sup>40</sup> IKZ, 1971, 3, p. 122.

<sup>41</sup> Science and Religion (Moscow), 1960, 1, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1960, 7, pp. 36-41.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1960, 8, p. 93.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1960, 9, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1959, 1, pp. 59-65.

<sup>46</sup> IKZ, 1966, 3, p. 123.

<sup>47</sup> IKZ, 1967, 1, p. 3, and Chrysostomus, op cit., III, pp. 275-276.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted by many authors.

<sup>49</sup> IKZ, 1976, 2, p. 65.

<sup>50</sup> IKZ, 1976, 2, p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> IKZ, 1974, 4, p. 212.

<sup>52</sup> A Danish translation.

<sup>53</sup> IKZ, 1980, 2, p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> A Resolution of March 16, 1924, with several "explanations," permitted religious instructions of children in the home of the parents or the "teacher" by the "servant of the cult," but only three children together at a given time. See Gidulyanov, Separation of the Church from the State, third edition (Moscow, 1926), pp. 373-374. The Decree on the Religious Associations of April 8, 1929, annulled the right of parents to have their children given religious instruction by the priest. Karpov stated in September, 1944, that the parents had the right to have priests give such training.

<sup>55</sup> Ostkirchliche Studien (Würzburg), 1980, pp. 311-333 and 1981, pp. 33-50 from the Messenger of the Russian Christian Student Movement (Vestnik), 1979, 130, pp. 275-344.

<sup>56</sup> The English language issue began in 1972.

<sup>57</sup> JMP, 1968, 9.

<sup>58</sup> JMP, 1967, 10 and 11.

<sup>59</sup> Johansen, op cit. Paul B. Anderson read this booklet and visited this writer in Denmark in October 1963 and asked him to study also at the Moscow Theological Academy in Zagorsk. In April 1964 the future Patriarch Pimen preached in my church and Metropolitan Aleksiy of Tallin read the gospel. I asked them to permit me to study in Zagorsk, but five months later I was refused. There may be a few important theses in Zagorsk, which are not available in the Leningrad Academy.

<sup>60</sup>"The Writings of Theologians of the Moscow Patriarchate on Ecumenical Themes." Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 12, 1, (Winter, 1975), pp. 29-52. See also 15, 2 (Spring, 1978), pp. 291-300.

<sup>61</sup>Diakonia, 12, 2 (1977), pp. 192-201.

Note: All Russian titles rendered into English by the author.