

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'

WHEN the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917, the Church of Russia found itself in a position for which there was no exact precedent in Orthodox history. The Roman Empire, although it persecuted Christians, was not an atheist state, opposed to all religion as such. The Turks, while non-Christians, were still worshippers of One God and, as we have seen, allowed the Church a large measure of toleration. But communism is committed by its fundamental principles to an aggressive and militant atheism. A communist government cannot rest satisfied merely with a separation of Church and State, but it seeks either by direct or indirect means to overthrow all organized Church life and to extirpate all religious belief. 'The Party cannot be neutral towards religion,' wrote Stalin. 'It conducts an anti-religious struggle against all and any religious prejudices.'¹ So the communists believed in 1917, and so they believe today; but while their doctrine has remained the same, their tactics have varied. Sometimes they have used direct persecution, sometimes they have preferred indirect methods.

The terms of the Soviet Constitution have grown progressively more severe. The Constitution of 1918 allowed 'freedom of religious and anti-religious propaganda' (Article 13); in 1929 this was changed to 'freedom of religious belief and

1. *Works*, Moscow, 1953, vol. x, p. 132.

of anti-religious *propaganda*', while the present Constitution (1977) permits 'freedom of religious *worship* and of anti-religious propaganda' (Article 52). Thus the Constitution allows the Church freedom of worship, but no freedom of propaganda: for the Church, as the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* puts it, is 'a union of believers created and existing *solely for the purpose of worship*'.

This emphasis upon worship is deliberate. The Soviet government, particularly since 1943, has permitted a number of church buildings to remain open for services, but both before and after 1943 it has subjected Christianity to a systematic and relentless policy of cultural strangulation. The Church can worship, but is not allowed to maintain charitable or social work; it can train a certain number of candidates for the priesthood, but otherwise is forbidden to undertake educational activities. Let us consider briefly what this means for Russian Christians today.

Atheist ideas are supposed to be taught in every school and by every teacher:

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 outside school, day in and day out.¹

How can a parish priest counteract this anti-religious propaganda? He can preach sermons during Church services (and this the Russian clergy of today, like Father John of Kronstadt, do with great assiduity), but he cannot give religious instruction at any other time or in any other way. He is forbidden to organize discussion or study groups, either among young people or adults; he cannot form a parish library, since the only books

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

which he is permitted to keep in church are service books; there are no suitable pamphlets which he can distribute to his people, since ecclesiastical publications in Russia are rigidly restricted. He cannot even give them Bibles to read: since 1956 the Russian Orthodox Church has on a few occasions been allowed to reprint the text of Scripture, but the number of copies available is tragically inadequate—fortunate indeed are the lay people who have a Bible of their own. In particular the parish priest is denied the possibility of holding catechism classes or Sunday schools; for the legal code strictly prohibits the giving of organized religious instruction to children or young people, and infringements of this rule are punished severely. This hardly constitutes 'religious freedom' in any normal sense of the word.

Nor is the teaching of atheism in schools the only method of propaganda which communists have employed. Former churches have been turned into 'museums of religion and atheism', many of which are now closed, but a few still remain open, most notably the museum in the former Kazan Cathedral at Leningrad. In the twenties and thirties an astonishing quantity of atheist periodicals and pamphlets were distributed, lecturers were sent out to every part of the U.S.S.R., and the 'League of Militant Atheists' was formed, with a nation-wide organization. The League was abolished in 1942, but its functions were taken over after the war by the 'All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Scientific and Political Knowledge', founded in 1947. Although not on such a large scale as before the war, anti-religious periodicals, pamphlets, and lectures are still vigorously maintained: in 1954, for example, 120,679 anti-religious lectures were given in the Soviet Union, while in 1958 the number had risen to 300,000. But there are constant protests in the Soviet press today about the lack of interest in atheist propaganda, particularly among young people.

Before the last war, anti-religious processions of a crude and blasphemous character used to be held in the streets, above all at Easter and Christmas. A Russian who saw these atheist celebrations has written:

There were no protests from the silent streets—the years of terror 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 were met with dull silence on the part of the occasional witnesses.¹

The matters of which we have spoken hitherto might be termed 'indirect' methods of persecution. But the communists have resorted to direct persecution as well, and even the 'freedom of religious worship' turns out on closer inquiry to be precarious. When the Decree on the Separation of Church and State was published on 5 February 1918, the Church ceased to possess any legal rights. The Decree deprived it of the power to hold property. All seminaries and theological academies were ordered to be closed down (since 1945 a few have been reopened). All Church buildings, lands, and moneys were declared to be national property; local authorities at their discretion could allow congregations to use their former places of worship, but if these local authorities, 'at the request of the workers', decided to close a church, the worshippers could do nothing to stop them. From 1918 until 1939, churches were methodically desecrated, closed, and destroyed, often against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the population and at times in the face of their active opposition.

The communists, moreover, have attacked not only property but persons. In the years between the two World Wars the Christians of Russia underwent sufferings which in extent and in cruelty equalled anything endured by the early Christians. Since the 1917 Revolution was specifically anti-religious, all active Christians in Russia could be classed as 'counter-revolutionaries' and treated accordingly. At one time as many as 150 bishops were in prison at the same moment (before 1917 the total number of diocesan and assistant bishops in the

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

Russian Empire was less than 130). In 1918 and 1919 alone, about twenty-eight bishops were killed; between 1923 and 1926 some fifty more were murdered by the Bolsheviks. Parish clergy and monks also suffered severely: by 1926, according to information supplied by a bishop living in Russia at the time, some 2,700 priests, 2,000 monks, and 3,400 nuns and other ordained persons had been killed, while *émigré* writers today calculate that since 1917, among priests alone, at least 12,000, and possibly far more, have been executed or have died through ill-treatment. These figures cannot of course be checked in detail, but in any case the number of deaths has been very large. It will never be known how many laity suffered impoverishment, prison sentences, or death because of their faith. In the words of the Archpriest Avvakum: 'Satan has obtained our radiant Russia from God, that she may become red with the blood of martyrs.'¹

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. 'In every place where the faith has been put to the test,' a Russian of the emigration writes, '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 light not of this world.' 'Nevertheless,' the same author rightly adds, '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.'² It is not surprising that

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

2. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 245–6. The miraculous 'renewal of icons', to which Lossky refers, has

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.

OFFICIAL CHURCH–STATE RELATIONS IN RUSSIA: THE ATTITUDE OF THE HIERARCHY

There can be no doubt about the devotion of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia. More open to criticism is the official policy of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which has by degrees adopted an increasingly conciliatory attitude towards the atheist government. But the reservations which one may feel about the hierarchy must in no sense be taken as a reflection upon the Russian Orthodox people as a whole.

The official *rapprochement* between the Church and communism reached a more or less definitive form in 1943–5, since when there have been no significant changes. The main features of the present situation are as follows:

(1) The Church is 'loyal' to the Soviet government. This means not only that it refrains from any criticism of the authorities, but also that it is pledged *actively* to support communist policies and propaganda at home and abroad, particularly communist foreign policy (Greek civil war, Korea, Hungary, and so on).¹

(2) In return the State has greatly relaxed direct forms of persecution, although such persecution has not entirely ceased. The forced closing of churches and the imprisonment of clergy still continue, but since 1945 cases have occurred less

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. Pro-Soviet propaganda by the Moscow Patriarchate has often bewildered Orthodox in other lands. Thus during the Greek civil war, the people of Greece were surprised to find that an Orthodox Patriarch should speak out in support of the communist partisans who desecrated Orthodox churches and crucified Orthodox priests.

frequently, and there have been far fewer instances of actual martyrdom.

(3) The policy of cultural strangulation has not been abandoned. The Soviet government continues to regard religion as an enemy to be combated on the ideological level, while the Church is not allowed to hit back.

(4) In theory the Church is granted 'freedom of inner government'. In practice the State has many means whereby it can interfere in religious affairs.¹

Let us consider the stages prior to the existing position. At the outset Patriarch Tikhon was firm and uncompromising towards the Bolsheviks. On 1 February 1918 he excommunicated those whom he termed 'the enemies of Christ, open or disguised', 'the godless rulers of the darkness of our time':

By the authority conferred upon us by God we forbid you to approach the Holy Sacraments, and if you still call yourselves Christians we anathematize you. . . . As for you, faithful sons of the Church, we call upon you to stand in defence of our holy Mother, now outraged and oppressed . . . and should it become necessary to suffer for the cause of Christ, we call upon you to follow us on the way of suffering. . . . And you, my brother bishops and priests . . . without delay organize religious associations, call upon them to range themselves among the spiritual combatants who will resist physical force with the power of the Spirit. We firmly believe that the enemies of the Church of Christ will be broken and scattered by the power of the Cross, for the promise of Him who bore the Cross is unalterable: *I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.* (Matthew xvi, 18.)

This excommunication was confirmed by the All-Russian Council of 1917-18 and has never been revoked. Later in 1918 Tikhon publicly condemned the murder of Emperor Nicholas II, while in a famous letter on the first anniversary of the October Revolution he wrote:

1. This analysis is taken (with some changes) from N. S. Timasheff, 'The Russian Orthodox Church Today', in *Saint Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* (New York), vol. 2 (new series), no. 3 (1958), pp. 40-50.

It is not for us to judge earthly powers. . . . However, to you who use your power for the persecution and destruction of the innocent, we issue our word of warning: celebrate the anniversary of your rise to power by releasing the imprisoned, by ceasing from bloodshed, violence, and havoc, and by removing restrictions upon the faith; devote yourselves not to destruction but to the building up of order and law; give to the people the respite from civil warfare which they have both desired and deserved. For otherwise the righteous blood which you have shed will cry out against you. *For all they who take the sword shall perish by the sword.* (Matthew xxvi, 52.)

But though Tikhon spoke with vehemence in these pronouncements, he did not take sides in any strictly political question. He condemned bloodshed and injustice, and he protested against attacks upon the Church; but he passed no judgement on communist social and economic measures as such. He excommunicated the Bolsheviks not because he disagreed with them politically, but because they were professed atheists; and he urged the faithful to resist not with military but with spiritual weapons.

Yet Tikhon's attitude, even if not political, was scarcely likely to prove acceptable to the communists. If they could not exterminate religious belief at once, then they wanted a Church so far as possible subservient to their policy; indeed they realized that a subservient Church might well prove more useful than no Church at all. Thus as well as attacking Orthodoxy from the outside - by propagating atheism, by closing churches, by killing and imprisoning the clergy - they also brought pressure to bear on Orthodox life from within. From May 1922 to June 1923 Tikhon 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 cooperation with the communist authorities. This group, which came to be known as the 'Renewed' or 'Living Church', initiated a sweeping programme of ecclesiastical reform; some of the enactments were directly contrary to Canon Law (for example, married bishops), but even though other reforms

were not objectionable in themselves, the whole movement was compromised by its crypto-communist character. Tikhon, as soon as he realized what was happening, denounced the Living Church and refused to have any dealings with it; but several Orthodox Churches abroad were deceived for a time, and in particular the Ecumenical Patriarchate during the 1920s extended a certain measure of official recognition to the Living Church. But within Russia itself most of the faithful soon appreciated the true nature of the Living Church and ceased to support it; as a result the government quickly lost interest in the movement, since it had been deprived of its value as a tool of communist policy. The Living Church in time split into several groups, and after 1926 was no longer of any great importance. The first attempt by the Bolsheviks to create within the Church a party obedient to their interests proved a fiasco.

But the communists continued to bring pressure on the Church in other ways. How far Tikhon was 'brainwashed' while in custody we shall never know, but after his imprisonment he spoke in a more conciliatory tone than he had done in 1917-18: this is particularly evident in his 'Confession' (issued shortly before his release from prison) and in his 'Will' (signed on the day of his death, 7 April 1925).¹ Yet if these later statements are carefully examined, it will be found that despite the change in tone, there is no change in principle from his earlier pronouncements. He remained, as before, non-political. 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.

1. Many Russian writers doubt the authenticity of the 'Will', regarding it as a communist forgery. Tikhon died suddenly, under mysterious circumstances. Perhaps a martyr, and certainly a confessor for the faith, he is widely venerated as a saint by Orthodox both within Russia and outside.

Faced by communist attempts to infiltrate into the Church and to influence it from within, Tikhon continued to demand a true and fair separation between Church and State. He desired a Church politically neutral but not politically subservient, and to his death he strove to guard Russian Orthodoxy from any interference in its inner life.

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 (Starogorodsky), Metropolitan of Nizhni-Novgorod, took over the leadership in his stead, with the curious 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 continued 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,¹ and on his release he requested the Soviet authorities to legalize the Patriarchal Synod over which he presided and to permit him to live at Moscow; these requests were promptly granted by the authorities (May 1927). It was a development which caused some alarm: legalization seemed to open the door to Soviet interference, since what a totalitarian government authorizes it can also control. Then on 29 July 1927 Sergius issued a new declaration, significantly different from his declaration 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’.

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 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

1. Perhaps he was ‘brainwashed’, just as Tikhon may have been. We must allow for this possibility when evaluating Sergius’s later actions.

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 sign 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 (Khrapovitsky), Presiding Bishop of the Russian Church in Exile, 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?’ ‘The Church,’ he continued, ‘cannot bless anti-Christian, much less atheistical politics.’ Metropolitan Evlogy, appointed by Tikhon as Exarch for Western Europe, was also much disturbed by this demand, and tried to avoid supplying any written statement of loyalty, while still maintaining relations with Sergius.

Inside Russia the policy of Sergius also provoked lively disapproval. Certainly there were some who supported Sergius, but there were many who strongly opposed him, and had he summoned a council of his fellow bishops in 1927 (of course the conditions at the time made such a thing impossible), it is doubtful whether a majority would have supported him. Chief among the opponents of the 1927 declaration was the Patriarchal *locum tenens* himself, Metropolitan Peter. ‘I have trusted Metropolitan Sergius,’ he is reported to have said, ‘and now I see that I was mistaken.’ And to Sergius himself Peter is said to have written: ‘If you yourself lack the strength to protect the Church, you should step aside and turn over your office to a stronger person.’ To the end of his life Peter of Krutitsy refused to accept the 1927 declaration, although promised release from exile if he would only agree to do so; and since Sergius was merely acting as Peter’s deputy, it is thus not clear what authority the document can be considered to possess. The declaration was also attacked by other Church leaders, including Cyril, Metropolitan of Kazan; Agathangel, Metropolitan of Yaroslavl (both of whom Tikhon had nominated as *locum tenentes* along with Peter); Joseph, Metropolitan of Saint Petersburg; and Seraphim, Archbishop of Kostroma.

Most of those who disagreed with Sergius were swiftly eliminated by the secret police, and the extent of the opposition to the deputy *locum tenens* was not realized by many because it was largely silenced.

Especially important in this connection is the statement drawn up in the summer of 1927 by the bishops interned at Solovky on the White Sea. True to the position of Tikhon – and of Sergius before 1927 – they expressed their complete loyalty to the State *in secular matters*, but they demanded a true separation of Church and State, such as should respect the internal freedom of the Church, and they emphasized the basic incompatibility between communist ideology and the Christian faith.

For those who could not accept the 1927 declaration of Sergius, and who were convinced that the Church would be sacrificing its integrity if it made the concessions now demanded of it by the Soviet State, there remained but one course: to work underground, to ‘disappear into the Catacombs’, where they could practise their faith without interference, unknown to Sergius and the communist authorities. A leading part in the formation of the ‘Catacomb Church’ was played by Maximus, Bishop of Serpukhov. Known in the world as Michael Shishilenko, by profession a doctor, he had been private physician and a close friend to Patriarch Tikhon. According to Maximus, Tikhon had prophesied that communist interference in Church life would increase after his death, and had told Maximus to form an underground religious organization if State pressure on the official Church became intolerable. In 1927 Maximus took Tikhon’s advice, and was secretly professed a monk and consecrated bishop. Maximus was put to death in 1930, but others continued his work: a large number of bishops, monks, and married priests took an ordinary job during the day, but by night or in the early morning held secret services when and where they could. Two accounts of such services have already been quoted, at the beginning of the first chapter.¹

1. The Catacomb Church is also known as the ‘Tikhon Church’, because it claims to represent the true Russian Orthodox Church, in

Meanwhile Sergius, undeterred by opposition, continued to follow the path which he believed to be right. He was forced to make many humiliating concessions to the State, and in particular to spread false information about ‘religious freedom’: for example, in an interview given during 1930 to foreign journalists he went so far as to claim that there had never been any persecution of religion in the Soviet Union. It is of course possible that many things were published in his name without his consent or knowledge. Some have sought to justify his conduct by suggesting that he underwent a sort of ‘martyrdom’, deliberately taking on himself the sin of lying in order to protect his flock from destruction. Others have not found this explanation satisfactory, but have felt that Sergius involved the Church in a soul-destroying policy of systematic duplicity. In the words of Metropolitan Anastasy, head of the Russian Church in Exile:

Our descendants will be ashamed when they compare the language of our chief hierarchs at the present day, when addressing those in power, with the language of the first Christians to the Emperors of Rome and their representatives . . .

To please the Soviet power, the chief hierarchs are not ashamed to propagate a flagrant lie, by saying that there have never been religious persecutions in Russia under the Soviet power. In this way they commit sacrilege, by turning to derision the multitude of Russian martyrs, openly calling them political criminals. A lie is always abominable and repugnant. . . . If one who is called to be a faithful witness to Christ lies knowingly to his conscience, to men, and to God, he becomes in truth guilty of contempt of the Holy Spirit. . . .

It is not without reason that the expressions ‘Soviet Church’ and ‘Soviet Patriarch’ have now become common in the mouth of Russians.¹

succession to Patriarch Tikhon.

1. See, for the full text of this letter, the periodical *Russie et Chrétienté*, 1946, no. 1, pp. 123–30.

For the time being the submissive policy of Sergius brought little apparent advantage. Despite legalization and despite the declaration of 1927, the closure of churches and the liquidation of clergy continued, and there were particularly virulent waves of persecution in 1929-30 and 1937-8. But in 1943 the outward situation changed. The Soviet government, hard pressed in the war, desperately needed the support of the entire nation, and so was prepared to grant some concessions to its Christian subjects, who formed an appreciable proportion of the population. From the start, the official Church under Sergius had in fact pledged its wholehearted assistance in the war effort, and in return the communists were willing to show – for the moment, at any rate – an increased toleration. There was also a further factor which influenced the government. When the German armies invaded Russia, the inhabitants in many places welcomed them as ‘liberators’: admittedly, the Russians were soon disillusioned, but that at any rate was their initial reaction. And the Nazis, in the parts of Russia which they captured, permitted and even encouraged the restoration of religious life. In the Kiev diocese, for example, where 1,710 parishes existed before the Revolution, only two churches were officially functioning in 1939, but after a year of German occupation 708 churches had been reopened.¹ The Soviet government, alarmed by the prospect of further desertions to the Nazi side, naturally felt it advisable to treat the Church as generously as the Germans were doing.

But if the position of Christianity in Russia now became easier, none of the laws against religion were repealed. The Church in Russia, though tolerated, enjoys no security, since its members know that the concessions can be withdrawn as easily as they were granted. Communist principles have not changed, and should the Soviet authorities judge it expedient, there is nothing to prevent them from reverting to the pre-war situation.

One of the first major concessions which Stalin made was the

1. In 1955 there were still 586 parishes in the Kiev diocese, but since then many churches have certainly been closed.

restoration of the Patriarchate, vacant since Tikhon's death in 1925. In September 1943 Sergius, deputy *locum tenens* from 1925 to 1936 and *locum tenens* since 1936, was elected Patriarch by a small council of nineteen bishops. Already an old man, he died the following year, and in February 1945 Alexis (Shimansky), Metropolitan of Leningrad, a close supporter of Sergius since 1927, was elected Patriarch in his place. Alexis (died 1970) and his successor Patriarch Pimen, elected in 1971, have adhered firmly to the *modus vivendi* effected by Sergius with the government.¹

Besides the restoration of the Patriarchate, Stalin also permitted the reopening of many churches, and of a few monasteries and theological schools. Between 1941 and 1947 the external aspect of the Church in Russia was utterly transformed, and the following figures² tell their own story:

	1914	1941	1947
Churches	54,457	4,255	22-25,000
Active priests	57,105	5,665	33,000
Monasteries and convents	1,498	38	80
Theological academies	4	None	2
Theological seminaries	57	None	8
Other religious schools	40,150	None	None

The figures for churches and priests in 1941 and 1947 cannot of course be checked: perhaps the former are too low, and perhaps (what is much more likely) the latter are too high. The sudden increase in priests is partly explained by the fact that in 1941 many were in hiding, but resumed priestly work at the end of the war; also areas were incorporated into the U.S.S.R. in 1945 where the churches had not been closed.

One fact stands out clearly from the statistics: apart from

1. Of course they do not stand alone. The same conciliatory policy towards communist authorities has been adopted by many other Christian leaders within Eastern Europe, both Protestant and Roman Catholic.

2. Taken from J. Meyendorff, *L'Église orthodoxe hier et aujourd'hui*, p. 135.

colleges for the training of priests no Church schools existed in 1947, nor do any exist today. The policy of cultural strangulation continues to be enforced as strictly as ever: cut off from the cultural and intellectual movements of the time, excluded from social and educational work, forbidden to answer anti-religious propaganda, the Church exists in a growing isolation which may in the end prove more deadly than open persecution. It is particularly difficult for the Church to exert any effective influence over children and youth. Yet if the Holy Liturgy saved Greek Orthodoxy under the Turks, it may be hoped that freedom of worship will preserve the Orthodox faith under communism. Time alone can show.

Even to exist in this isolation, the Church is forced to pay a heavy price. Church leaders are obliged to act as propagandists for Soviet home and foreign policy, and to take a prominent part in such things as the communist-sponsored 'Peace' Movement. The *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (the only Church publication permitted, apart from calendars, service books, collections of sermons, and a theological review) regularly includes political articles on the 'struggle for peace' and the like. The *Journal* used also to contain frequent attacks against the Roman Catholic Church, closely similar in tone to the political articles. Often these attacks on Rome were by writers who when treating other topics displayed real learning and depth of Christian feeling. How can we explain the violent and unscholarly manner in which they spoke of their fellow Christians? 'One can hardly doubt that these contributions show the effect of direct pressure from without: unadulterated theology could hardly descend to such a level.'¹

Nor is this the full account of the price paid for a severely limited toleration. While the ecclesiastical administration under the restored Patriarchate appears to function in a normal manner, the laws of the U.S.S.R. in fact allow the State in-

1. A. Schmemmann, 'The Revival of Theological Studies in the U.S.S.R.', in *Religion in the U.S.S.R.*, edited Boris Iwanow, Munich, 1960, p. 42. Attacks on Rome in the *Journal* began to diminish after Stalin's death, and since Vatican II they have ceased altogether.

numerable ways of interfering. No Church Council, large or small, can be assembled, and no new parish can be organized, without government consent; no one, from the Patriarch to the humblest parish priest, can assume any ecclesiastical office without the approval of the civil authority. Priests, like other professional men, require a licence to exercise their profession, and this licence can at any time be withdrawn. The communists therefore have at their disposal an elaborate machinery for eliminating undesirable bishops or priests and replacing them with 'safe' men. It is not impossible that there is extensive communist infiltration into the ranks of the Russian clergy at the present time. The Soviet authorities would find little difficulty in sending their agents to theological seminaries and so securing their ordination, but how far they in fact resort to such tactics we do not of course know.

The price which the leaders of the Russian Church have agreed to pay is indeed a heavy one. Has the Moscow Patriarchate chosen aright? Would it have been better to adopt the way of martyrdom, as the Catacomb Church has done? How, in other words, ought a Christian under militant atheist rule to bear witness to his faith? These are questions to which Orthodox today give varying answers. None can doubt the agonizing position in which leaders of the Russian Church have been placed since 1917, but not all agree that the path which Sergius, Alexis, and Pimen have followed is the best. Some feel that they have adopted the only practicable policy in trying to guard their flock from continued persecution, and in seeking at all costs to preserve an outward organization, with churches open for public worship, with monasteries and theological schools. Others, both within Russia and outside, would reply that it is not outward organization that matters, but inward integrity; and they view with sorrow and indignation the way in which (so it seems to them) the shepherds of the Christian flock have agreed to collaborate with the enemies of Christ.

Need the church leaders in fact adopt so submissive an attitude? Could they not, without forfeiting a working relationship with the State, adopt a far more independent stand?