

Editorial

During the Second World War an extraordinary religious revival took place in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union after the German invasion in 1941. This upsurge of new life re-invigorated the Church, whose visible structure had been almost completely destroyed in the 1930s by Stalin's totalitarian regime. Yet the revival in the occupied areas revealed how the faith of the people had survived in secret and was waiting for an opportunity to manifest itself. Realizing the strength of the Church and the vital support which it could give to national morale, Stalin made a sort of Concordat with the Russian Orthodox Church in 1943 whereby the Patriarchate was restored and the structure of the Church re-established. The religious revival in German-occupied territories is now described in some hitherto unpublished German Intelligence documents. Extracts from these documents (see pp. 31-37) and an introductory article are published in this issue of *RCL* (a number of further extracts will be included in the next issue).

The revival was spontaneous and on a mass scale: according to one document (15 August, 1941) referring to the Pskov and Ostrov area:

... it has been observed that almost the entire population pours into the churches ...

Churches which had been closed and disfigured were re-opened, icons re-installed, and services organized. For some, it was difficult to remember how to behave in church:

... the first thing the population did was to clean up as best they could the local church, filthy after 20 years of disuse, or which had been converted into a grain-store, and furnish it with an old golden icon which they had dug up somewhere. The women then entered the church shyly and hesitatingly; the older ones obviously remembered the proper ritual from earlier times, whereas the younger women were doubtful about how to behave. (Document dated 12 September, 1941)

The Mission of Pskov illustrates the vitality of the revival. This Mission was organized from the Baltic States by Metropolitan Sergi Voskresensky. Fourteen young priests were sent by him to Pskov to organize the

Mission: they received an enthusiastic welcome. Five churches were re-opened in Pskov; a candle factory, a workshop for icons, a printing press and a library were set up in the *Kremlin*; and in August 1942 the first number of the Mission's monthly magazine, *The Orthodox Christian*, was printed. Religious education was organized for children and study groups met regularly. By 1943 the Mission included 85 priests serving 220 parishes.

In the Ukraine, too, the revival was intense. Despite the rivalry of two Orthodox jurisdictions, the reconstruction of religious life was extremely successful. One of these jurisdictions, the "autocephalist church" claimed that in the diocese of Kiev, by early 1942, 298 parishes were re-organized served by 455 priests, 136 of whom had been recently ordained. In 1942 the other jurisdiction, the "autonomous church", in this same diocese of Kiev claimed that it had 410 parishes served by 434 priests. Monastic life was restored. In the diocese of Kiev alone eight monasteries were re-established, including the famous Monastery of the Caves, whilst in many of the large towns new monastic communities were formed.

As a matter of convenience the Nazis put few obstacles in the way of the revival of religion in the occupied territories, but they did actively encourage splits in the Church. Life under a totalitarian regime is always precarious. Neither the Nazi totalitarian system nor the Stalinist variety could tolerate any ideas or doctrines which rivalled the ruling ideology. For both systems the Church was a challenge to the system's total control over individual lives. Both systems tried to manipulate the Church for political ends: both posed as protectors of the faith when it was to their advantage. For example, during the war the German authorities supported those denominations which they hoped would be useful to them; and Stalin re-established the Patriarchate. Yet, during the war, both under German rule and Soviet rule, religious believers in the USSR took advantage, when they could, of the "protection" offered, precarious though it was, and reaped a rich harvest.

In a totalitarian system, this "protection" has no guarantees: the "Leader" (Stalin or Hitler), who controls all the levers of power, can change his policy at any moment and is under no compulsion to treat all Churches alike. When the Western Ukraine was occupied by Soviet troops towards the end of the war, the Uniate – or Greek Catholic – Church (see the article on pp. 4–12) was forcibly reunited with the Orthodox Church and since then has had no legal existence whatever.

Since the death of Stalin, the Soviet system can no longer be called, strictly speaking, totalitarian. In the present period of "collective leadership" no one man has total control. For the Churches, however, life continues to be precarious – and yet, so often, that is the way to sanctification.