

# Documents

## German Intelligence Reports

*Translated by Keith Armes*

*The following extracts from German intelligence reports are published for the first time. They provide information about the religious revival in German-occupied areas of the Soviet Union. An introductory article to these documents is printed on pp. 27-30. The original German text is available on microfilm and can be obtained through the Committee for the Study of War Documents, American Historical Association, Washington D.C. Before each extract, we print the reference number and date of each report as well as the page number from which extracts have been taken. Ed.*

### TERRITORY WHICH UNTIL 1939 HAD BEEN PART OF POLAND

(No. 25, 17 July 1941, p. 3)

Attendance at church services extremely heavy. Churches reclaiming their former possessions (monasteries and lands). In a few cases official Wehrmacht approval given.

### UKRAINE: ZHITOMIR AREA

(No. 26, 18 July 1941, p. 5)

The Ukrainians, Germans and Poles never Party members and are politically opposed. Religious-minded and secretly celebrate the church festivals. Since arrival of German troops public religious gatherings with many young people participating. Churches destroyed or used as storehouses.

### PORKHOV, NEAR PSKOV

(No. 34, 26 July 1941, p. 8)

In distinction to the hitherto unclear and evidently regionally very varied attitudes of the urban population, on the part of the rural population, especially the older people, a positive attitude towards the entry of the German Wehrmacht can be observed, insofar as the people again have the opportunity of giving expression to their religious sentiments and observing their religious customs. In the case of the rural population the religious factor should be decisive in the future for determining their attitudes. Skilful propaganda might use this as the basis for bringing about an open rejection of the Soviet regime.

### UKRAINE: ZHITOMIR AREA

(No. 37, 29 July 1941, p. 6)

The Ukrainian population is extremely religious in its basic attitudes, at least in the case of the older people. The churches were either used by the Soviets for public purposes or destroyed. Nevertheless there were wandering preachers, especially in the rural areas, who went from village to village attracting crowds of believers. The desire for church care is extraordinarily great. As far as can be determined to date, the atheistic propaganda carried out by the Soviets was unsuccessful everywhere in the areas hitherto occupied by German troops.

RUSSIAN AREAS BORDERING ESTONIA AND  
LATVIA

(No. 40, 1 August 1941, pp. 17-18)

A conscious acceptance of Bolshevik ideology by the population scarcely took place. The atheistic movement is rejected by the rural population even in places where there are no longer any priests. Only a very small proportion of the members of the Komsomol took an active part in the movement. Even old, convinced Party members were often seen to pray before execution. Evidently even these people were not completely convinced of the correctness of their own teaching.

## MINSK

(No. 43, 5 August 1941, pp. 14, 24-25)

In the course of the reorganization of Orthodox church life, services have already been held in Minsk which attracted crowds of thousands of believers. 45 children were christened at the first service. The sermons took the form of an expression of thanks to the Führer. The interest of the population is very great everywhere.

## YAMPOL, UKRAINE

About 4000 of the 6000 inhabitants of Yampol are Christians of the Greek Orthodox faith. Small Polish splinter groups which are entirely Roman Catholic still live amongst them. The Soviet authorities have succeeded by means of their anti-church measures in achieving their aim of extinguishing all church life. Before 1917-18 there were two Greek Orthodox and one Roman Catholic church in this area. Two of the priests in charge of these churches were shot by the Soviets, while the third managed to flee in time. The first church was then used as a grain-store, the second as a stable, and the third was closed. The result was that open church life came to an end and religious devotion was restricted to the private houses of the believers, as far as physical location is concerned.

It is clear from statements made by various Orthodox believers that they long greatly for a church life which corresponds to their own particular needs. One of the first questions asked by a Ukrainian during an interview was, "When can we go to church again?" This question may be considered typical

for the majority of the Ukrainians, who have preserved their religious beliefs despite all the measures of persecution.

## VINNITSA, UKRAINE

(No. 45, 7 August 1941, pp. 6, 9)

The question of the continued existence of the Church and its precise nature cannot be conclusively answered. While no rejection of the Church could be observed, definite support was found mainly only in the case of a few women and older men. The younger generation and the middle-aged appear to be indifferent to the question, but willing to go along with the others if this should be desired. The basic question is whether it will ever be possible to re-establish God once he has been "overthrown and ridiculed" and to give him an authority which would extend beyond external ceremony and be of moral importance. [. . .]

In many schools there were anti-religious circles, which held their meetings deliberately on the days of the great Christian festivals. Discussions took place on religious questions led by a Pioneer or a Komsomol, which however aroused no response and were very poorly attended. In addition older pupils and teachers checked on the families of children who were suspected in school of being religious and in whose homes it was believed that the Christian festivals were secretly celebrated.

## UKRAINE

(No. 52, 14 August 1941, p. 14)

*Attitude to Religion*

Like the local *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans), the Ukrainians are decidedly religious in the Christian sense. Their efforts are directed towards the restoration of Orthodox parishes with the preaching in Ukrainian, while the liturgy is to be in Old Church Slavonic. The former priests are already worried about the question of the canonical legitimacy of earlier ordinations. The view that the young people are indifferent about religion is mistaken as regards the countryside, and only partially correct as regards the towns. The essential thing to be borne in mind is that specific denominational consciousness (Slavic Orthodox) has become rather weak, and so there exists a catacomb religious life similar to primitive Christ-

ianity. The danger that Rome may interfere, either directly through the Catholic Church or indirectly through the Uniate Church, can be considered to be great if no inner stabilization of the traditional Eastern Church should take place. Such a stabilization is dependent upon solving the question of finding suitable sacristans, preachers, and priests. Until now the available priests have been little interested in national questions; unlike the Uniate clergy, in their case religious interests completely outweigh political interests.

AREA OF PSKOV AND OSTROV  
(No. 53, 15 August 1941, p. 6)

In the course of the church services held to date in various border towns, including Pskov and Ostrov, it has been observed that almost the entire population pours into the churches or onto the public squares to attend the service and can obviously be influenced by the priests.

KODYMA, UKRAINE

(No. 64, 26 August 1941, p. 5)

Given the very small number of teachers who were convinced communists, the communist influence of the teachers on cultural life was also very small. In the local schools children were not required to write anti-religious compositions as they were for example in Bessarabia. The "Union of Young Atheists" had no branches at all in the schools. Public propaganda was carried out only on the occasion of the principal communist festivals. On these festival days the children had to write compositions about Stalin and Lenin, etc. The material relating to materialist-communist ideology, which was presented mainly during science lessons, had no effect on the schoolchildren, since the latter were informed in the evenings by their parents, who had remained firmly rooted in their Greek Orthodox faith, about the faith and beliefs of Greek Orthodox Christianity, and were strengthened in this faith by prayers in their native Ukrainian.

According to the unanimous statements of teachers who were not active communists, the overall success of the Soviets in bringing up the schoolchildren as communists can consequently be con-

sidered to have been very limited. [ . . ]

The religious attitudes of the local population are still firmly based upon Greek Orthodoxy. This deeply rooted Greek Orthodox faith is the basic characteristic of the attitudes of the population. The older generation has kept firmly to its Greek Orthodox faith and has brought up the children in this faith. This deep rootedness in religious faith is demonstrated by the fact that the believers were in the habit of taking their children to Odessa to be baptised, since in Odessa a Greek Orthodox church had remained open.

BELORUSSIA

(No. 73, 4 September 1941, pp. 9, 10-11)

According to unanimous reports the interest of the Belorussian and Russian population in Greek Orthodox church life is still increasing. The reopening of the churches is invariably interpreted as the clearest sign of the change in the times brought about by the German occupation. The desire has been expressed in Greek Orthodox quarters that the German occupation authorities should ensure an equitable distribution of the local clergy between the various towns and rural districts, in order to avoid an accidental excess of priests in some towns, while in other towns and above all in the countryside there is a total lack of clergy. This situation shows that at the present time there is no trace of any Greek Orthodox Church organization. [ . . ]

The directive which stipulates that Wehrmacht religious services should be held without the participation of the civil population is still being inadequately complied with, according to a number of observations. For example, numerous civilians attended an Evangelical field service in Borisov and even received the blessing of the *padré* at the end of the service. Similarly, on numerous occasions in Smolensk, it was observed, large numbers of civilians attended German field services as spectators. Army Group Centre and the General Commanding Rear Army Area Centre were informed accordingly. It was proposed that in the interests of preserving a proper distance between German soldiers and the foreign civil population, field services should be closed to all except Wehrmacht personnel.

## UKRAINE

(No. 81, 12 September 1941, pp. 15-16)

*The Church Question*

It is impossible to provide a uniform picture of the church situation. In general the older generation is very attached to the Church, as is also the younger generation in rural areas, whereas a definite indifference was observed in industrial areas. In certain villages only a few hours after the arrival of our troops the first thing that 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.

## UKRAINE

(No. 89, 20 September 1941, pp. 7-12)

[*The report discusses the Bolshevik struggle against religion in the course of a lengthy study, "Observations on the East Ukrainian Rural Population".*]

Popular culture and religious observances are closely connected in the way of life of the East Ukrainian rural population. In order to combat ethnic customs, it was necessary first to eradicate the people's attachment to the Church. While the Ukrainian people still have customs of pre-Christian origin (e.g. the summer festival of Ivan Kupalo), religious and ethnic customs are everywhere closely interwoven. [ . . ]

[*The report goes on to discuss the stages of the Bolshevik anti-religious struggle.*]

*Period 1 (1931)* During this period the separation of the Church from the State and the gradual liquidation of the larger church parishes was carried out. The confiscation of church property, heavy taxation of parishes and the persecution of individual prominent clergy brought the churches to the verge of collapse. The anti-religious propaganda was aimed at young people and was not yet extended to cover the entire population. Individuals could continue to exercise their religion relatively without hindrance; however, in most cases the ex-

ternal framework of a church parish was lacking. The rural parishes were destroyed with particular thoroughness, whereas in the towns many parishes managed to survive for an astonishingly long time. In Zhitomir, for instance, three churches still existed until the outbreak of war and one of the parishes was still active. The Reds held the view that among the "déclassé intelligentsia" religion was just a convention or a whimsey: it was only in the case of the rural population that religious belief was taken seriously by the communists. In fact, it is characteristic of the situation in the towns that today church life depends mainly upon people who originated from the countryside and fled to the town in the course of the last decade. In the big industrial cities of the Dnieper region, although the workers were clearly not completely bolshevized, a definite indifference towards religious matters is observable. During the second period of the anti-religious struggle [i.e. after 1931] the Bolsheviks adopted a policy of punishing individuals who participated in the secret life of the Church or continued to observe the traditional festivals. The possession of Orthodox pictures (icons), crosses and banners, and the observing of church ceremonies were punishable offences. The extent and degree of ruthlessness of the anti-religious struggle varied from place to place; thus in Novo-Ukrainka the traditional burial ceremonies were forbidden very early, whereas they could still be carried out in a few places (Vinnitsa, Gaisyn) relatively without hindrance until the present time. It was during this second period of the general liquidation of the clergy, the destruction of religious monuments and the persecution of believers that the *principal struggle against popular customs* was carried out. In evaluating the success of this policy it is important to abandon the mistaken view that the Bolshevik policy of destruction was directed only against the big landowners, the priests and the kulaks. In reality all the non-Jewish sections of the population were affected: there is scarcely a single worker or peasant family which did not have relatives exiled, sentenced, or murdered. Thus no protected neutral area existed in which particular sections of the population might have been able to develop

relatively unobserved. *This makes it all the more astounding that the customs of the people have been preserved almost unchanged.*

The great Ukrainian festival days, which are mostly also church festivals, continued to be celebrated almost everywhere despite their being officially prohibited.

1. *Blessing of the Waters*, so-called "Jordan-festival". The traditional Orthodox blessing of the waters was preserved. If a priest was available he conducted the ceremony, otherwise well-informed old men (or women) or the so-called deacons take [sic] his place. In the pre-Bolshevik period the deacons were church attendants without theological education who remained with the laypeople during the service and led the singing. As lay members of the Church it was relatively easy for them to camouflage themselves or adapt themselves outwardly. As a result there is a relatively large number of deacons in the countryside.

2. *Provody* - All Souls Day in spring. The custom of putting food on the graves of dead relatives was preserved. The usual ritual was performed by deacons or by old people.

3. *Easter*. The Ukrainian Easter festival, which is an especially rich part of national culture, has been perfectly preserved in certain respects. All the customs known by the names of *paskha*, *shuka*, *krashchanki* and *pysanki* remained alive. Even the young children know all about the painted eggs and the traditional kinds of pastry. The blessing was carried out by the deacons, either secretly in one of the peasant huts or in a town far away where there was still a church (Kirovograd in the case of Novo-Ukrainka - a distance of 100 km). The traditional children's games (*Hahilky*) had died out, since the church square where they usually took place was no longer available.

4. *Whitsun*. The traditional customs, in particular the hanging of houses with green branches, remained intact.

5. The *Makkovei* festival, or summer festival of the blessing of flowers, also remained alive. The same applies to the *Spas* festival (blessing of fruit). The ceremonial blessing was performed by deacons or by priests in towns considerable distances away.

6. Among the festivals preceding Christmas, in particular the *Andrei* as well as the *Nikolai* customs have been preserved.

7. *Christmas* continues to be of decisive importance in the calendar. The principal features of the Ukrainian Christmas festival (Christmas dinner, Christmas carols) have been preserved. Popular festivals lacking a church character have been preserved if anything to an even greater extent. [The report refers to the "Ivan Kupalo" festival, the Sunday Vulyzia, and the Harvest Festival (Obshynki).] [ . . . ]

In summation it can be stated that the East Ukrainian rural population has preserved its customs despite the Bolshevik terror. In cases where they were linked to church observances frequently adaptations had to be made in accordance with the new situation. Such adaptations took place in a troublefree manner. Since the priests could no longer be openly active, the people had them baptise babies secretly or had the babies baptised by old men with the requisite knowledge. If baptism was completely impossible, at least godparents were chosen in the normal way and the traditional baptism customs were celebrated with their assistance. In the case of the traditional rural wedding there was one difficulty: the collective farm manager would not provide the horses which were needed for the ceremony of the arrival of the bridegroom, escorted by the best man and other friends (*druzhki*). This part of the ceremony was consequently abandoned, and only the remaining wedding customs were celebrated. In the case of funerals certain church ceremonies became more and more difficult to observe (e.g. the carrying of church banners), and so the people adapted themselves to the new situation by introducing a new custom, that of having a band accompany the funeral procession.

#### ALL OCCUPIED TERRITORY

(No. 90, 21 September 1941, p. 19)

The revival of the Greek Orthodox Church still continues with the active participation of the civil population. In the recently occupied towns also the population immediately requested permission to reopen the churches and hold services.

SOUTHERN UKRAINE: TERRITORY OCCUPIED BY ROMANIA

(No. 100, 1 October 1941, pp. 6-8)

In view of the fact that Bolshevik rule with its state-directed atheistic propaganda did not succeed in endangering the religious feelings of the people at all seriously and that attachment to the Greek Orthodox Church is still firmly rooted in the population, the Romanian authorities intend to have anti-communist propaganda and ideological education carried out by the Church. [ . . . ]

It has been noted that during the Bolshevik period for a long time religious life was scarcely impeded. Frequently even high communist officials were anxious to have their children secretly baptised. It was not until 1933-35 that extreme persecution of the Church began within the framework of intensified atheistic propaganda. At that time the majority of the clergy were arrested or exiled. In accordance with the "freedom of belief" in the Soviet Union the population was put under great pressure to petition the local Soviets about closing churches "because of their activity hostile to the people". The Bolshevik authorities then noted the unanimous wishes of the population, closed the churches and removed the church property. Since 1935 no more services have been held in the Anaev district.

Immediately after the arrival of the German troops the churches were reopened and two priests who had remained took up their activity again in the three churches which were still intact. A fourth church will be opened within the next few days. The services are always packed: parents above all feel the urgent need to have their children baptised in church now that they finally have the opportunity. In the Anaev district the two priests so far have baptised about 600 children up to eight years of age. The desire is also being expressed that marriages contracted earlier finally receive the blessing of the Church. However, this presents considerable difficulties: for the priests first of all, since according to the dogma of the Orthodox Church divorce is impossible. Consequently it is necessary first to verify whether the partners had been married previously and their marriages dissolved under Soviet law.

Furthermore, in the Orthodox Church the services as well as the marriage ceremony are essentially based on outward form. Thus until the golden crowns are available, which in accordance with the ritual must be held over the heads of the couple during the marriage ceremony, marriages cannot be held. In the same way church banners, icons, censers, candles and vestments for the priests and choirboys are lacking, all articles which are absolutely indispensable for Greek Orthodox services. According to the assertion of the priest at Anaev, any internalization of the service, whereby greater weight would be laid on the words of the service, is firmly rejected by the population. The people want the services to remain exactly as they were before, with the ceremonial based on pure outward form.

SMOLENSK AREA

(No. 107, 8 October 1941, p. 7)

*Church Life*

Reports are still coming in from various towns about the very lively participation of the civil population in the Greek Orthodox services. Belated baptisms are being carried out in great numbers, but so far belated church marriages have not been reported. In Velish peasants even dug up bodies which had been buried several months earlier in order to have them blessed by the priest now that this had become possible. The special commando of the Action Group (*Einsatzgruppe*) stationed in the area intervened and strictly prohibited priests from performing such acts.

UKRAINE: KIEV AND KIEV REGION

(No. 112, 13 October 1941, pp. 3-4)

The attitude towards the Church is positive here as everywhere else, particularly amongst the older generation, while the attitude of the young people is indifferent and in a certain percentage of cases even adverse. However, the older people believe that under their influence the young people will very quickly come to welcome the Church again. Everywhere the restoration of the churches has already begun, since, as is well known, the churches were used by the Bolsheviks for the most varied purposes (storehouses, cinemas, garages, gymnasiums, etc.) when they were not

completely demolished and destroyed. Also prayerhouses have been set up. In places where a priest is available well-attended services are already being held; otherwise prayer meetings are being held under the direction of a woman or man from the local population. In this area also the desire has been expressed that the cyrillic used up until now as the church language should be replaced by Ukrainian and that, if at all possible, an Ukrainian National Church should be established with its head in Kiev.

#### SOUTHERN UKRAINE: ROMANIAN-OCCUPIED TERRITORY

(No. 113, 14 October 1941, p. 3)

In reports from the [Einsatz] commandos it is repeatedly stated that people urgently want church services to be held and church ceremonies, such as baptisms, weddings, etc., to be performed. Only the younger generation presents a certain exception to this. [ . . ] In the Bug region the churches have been almost totally destroyed. It appears that the persecution of the Church was more intensive in the areas farther to the East than in the Soviet Moldavian Republic.

#### KIEV AND THE UKRAINE

(No. 117, 18 October 1941, pp. 3, 7, 8)

[The report refers to the old Eastern Orthodox Church, also called the Tikhon Group or the Slavonic Church.]

This is the Church in which Patriarchal *locum tenens*, Sergi of Moscow, was active. Through his Concordat with the Bolshevik State he came into conflict with the great majority of the faithful and now practically speaking represents only his own particular group, one which is of no significance in the Ukraine. [ . . ] The Slavonic Church is in terms of canon law the direct legal descendant of the pre-revolutionary Orthodox Church. Its hierarchical structure has remained intact according to

the canonical views of Orthodoxy. The majority of the priests in the country, both Ukrainians and Russians, belong to this tendency. A russophile trend is unmistakable amongst some of the priests of Ukrainian origin. [ . . ]

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Church has parishes in all the larger towns and in many places in the rural areas. There are no dogmatic differences between it and the Slavonic Church. What is decisive for the split between them is the following: the members of the Autocephalous Church reject a unitary Orthodox Church, such as existed before the World War, and in particular Moscow as its centre; they are determined anti-Bolsheviks and opponents of Moscow, and most of them are also Ukrainian nationalists. [ . . ]

The percentage of the population belonging to the Slavonic Church may be estimated at rather less than 55%, and the percentage belonging to the Autocephalous Church at perhaps 40%. [The report states that the remaining 5% are divided between the Living Church and a number of sects, including the Stundists, Evangelical Christians, Baptists and Adventists.] The so-called Living Church, also termed the Synodical Church, was at one time prepared to make an accommodation with Bolshevism and changed a number of the doctrines of Orthodoxy. Apart from Berdichev, the church was of no significance in the Ukraine. It was prevented from holding further service in Berdichev [by the German authorities].

#### Editor's Note

RCL Vol. 5, No. 2 will contain further extracts from German Action Group reports which refer to religious life in occupied areas of the USSR.