

The Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate Today

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Congresses and symposia are being arranged worldwide in preparation for the millennium marking the baptism of Grand-Duke Vladimir in 988 and the subsequent "Baptism of Rus' ". These congresses will lead to many meetings with representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate, above all with the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church.¹ It is important for both sides, the Western partners and the Orthodox, that we know who these bishops are, how they think, and above all what their attitude is towards the Soviet state, whose leadership, the Communist Party, is avowedly atheist.

When the October Revolution broke out in Russia seventy years ago — totally changing the structure of the state, society and the relationship between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church — a Local (national) Council (*Pomestny Sobor*), aimed at reforming the church, was taking place. It appointed a patriarch again as head of the church and reordered church life, which had been totally subject to the Tsar since the time of Peter the Great. Even during the preparations for the Council, the wish had been expressed that bishops should no longer be appointed by the Holy Synod alone, but should be elected by church members in the diocese, in accordance with the tradition of the Eastern Church.² They were also no longer to be transferred arbitrarily, as the authorities chose. The bishops and the church might indeed have been able to experience the Council and

¹Two congresses have already taken place in the German Federal Republic: one organised by the Catholics on 21-26 April in Regensburg, and one organised by the Protestants on 7-10 May in Tutzing. Several bishops and professors of the Theological Academies of the Moscow Patriarchate took part in both congresses. A conference on the theology and spirituality of the Russian Orthodox Church took place in Moscow on 11-18 May and another is planned for December 1987. In co-operation with the Moscow Patriarchate, the Protestant Academy in Tutzing is arranging a travelling exhibition from 2 October 1987, "A Thousand Years of the Church in Russia", in 16 towns in Bavaria and four other towns in the Federal Republic, with Russian bishops again participating. The exhibition will run until the end of January 1989.

²Father Erwin Immekus, *Die Russisch-Orthodoxe Landpfarrei zu Beginn des XX. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg, 1978), pp. 259ff.

the dawning of the new era as a kind of liberation since the church seemed to be becoming independent of the state. Unfortunately their wishes were not fulfilled: because of the incipient severe persecution it was not possible even to initiate free elections of bishops in the dioceses; instead the new patriarch, Tikhon, had to endeavour to ordain many new bishops, some secretly, in order to secure their continued existence. Thus between 1918 and 1929 some 287 bishops were ordained in the Soviet Union, 236 of these during Patriarch Tikhon's time in office. In the 1930s, only another 36 were ordained, and thirty more between 1940 and 1943, about 18 of whom were ordained during the German occupation. So many bishops were being arrested, exiled or shot that the church leadership, in so far as it remained at all intact during this troubled time, was also forced to make numerous transfers. Of the 507 bishops living in the Soviet Union between 1918 and 1943, only about 106 died a natural death, some 292 disappeared or perished, and 28 died abroad. By the end of 1939 there were no more than four bishops remaining in office. All the others were dead, in exile, in prison or had emigrated.³

The turning-point for the beleaguered church came with the "Great Patriotic War". When Metropolitan Sergi (Stragorodsky), the administrator of the patriarchate, called on the faithful to defend their motherland, Stalin recognised the church's vital role in the defence of the country and granted it certain concessions. A Council of Bishops was allowed to convene on 8 September 1943, attended by 19 hastily-summoned hierarchs who elected Metropolitan Sergi as patriarch. In the following three years the church was able to ordain forty bishops, and 42 returned "from retirement", as it was termed — that is, from exile or prisons and camps. On the occasion of Stalin's seventieth birthday (21 December 1949) 74 bishops signed his birthday greeting. Since 1943, 213 bishops have been ordained, while 228 have died during the same period. The number of bishops holding office has therefore remained at roughly the same level since then.

These briefly-recounted facts and figures have to be borne in mind if one wishes to understand the behaviour and thinking of the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church today. We shall return to this later.

Today there are 75 serving bishops as well as the 78-year-old Patriarch Pimen (Izvekov); a further seven bishops have retired; none is missing or imprisoned. Of the ruling hierarchs, five live

³These and the following figures are based on the work *Die Russischen-orthodoxen Bischöfe von 1893 bis 1965*, bibliographies by Metropolitan Manuil Lemeshevsky, brought up to date by Father Coelestin Patock, OSA, Parts I-IV (*Oikonomia: Quellen und Studien zur Orthodoxen Theologie*, in collaboration with K. Chr. Felmy and M. George in conjunction with M. S. Agursky), Fairy von Lilienfeld, Erlangen, 1979-85. Vol. V is being printed and Vol. VI, the last, is in preparation. The figures given can only be approximately accurate since the *vitae* of the individual bishops are incomplete.

permanently abroad and probably do not possess Soviet citizenship. A further seven bishops hold an overseas post: they are *ordinarii* of an overseas diocese in the exarchates of the Moscow Patriarchate or, as titular bishops, representatives of the Patriarch in Damascus or Geneva or leaders of the Russian parishes in the USA and Canada. Other bishops are engaged in church administration. Thus only 58 hierarchs are in fact *ordinarii*, leaders of a diocese (*yeparkhiya*) in the Soviet Union itself. In the 1950s, however, there were 73 dioceses in the Soviet Union — the vacant dioceses are now administered by neighbouring bishops. Many dioceses appear in fact to have been dissolved and incorporated into another, for example, the diocese of Drogobych and Sambor has been incorporated into the diocese of L'vov; Belorussia used to have three dioceses, but now has only one — that of Minsk and Belorussia.

Of the bishops holding office, 15 were born before the outbreak of the Revolution, two of them in the 19th century. Twenty-five bishops were born in the 1920s, twenty in the 1930s and 12 in the 1940s, so most bishops (45) are between fifty and seventy years old, while 12 are between thirty and fifty. Only 15 bishops are over seventy (four are eighty). The episcopate is, then, relatively young. Some 52 bishops have clear memories of the war.

All the bishops were ordained after the war: four in the 1950s, 26 in the 1960s, thirty in the 1970s; since 1980 16 bishops have been ordained. Today only 11 bishops come from a clerical family, that is, their father was a priest, deacon or precentor. In days gone by the proportion used to be much higher. Twenty-nine bishops come from a peasant background.⁴

In contrast to the Western churches, in the Eastern Church it is a prerequisite for ordination as a bishop that one should be a monk. This still applies today in the Russian Orthodox Church. After the war (and in the 19th century too), when there were very few candidates from among the monks, many widowers were ordained as bishops. They were tonsured monks shortly before their ordination and promoted to the rank of archimandrite; this often took place in the space of just a few days. Of the 76 bishops currently holding office, 57 were formerly monks, that is, their consecration as monk was not directly connected with their promotion to the office of bishop. In some cases the period between a man's consecration as monk and appointment as bishop was relatively short, about two years, suggesting that the prospect of a bishopric had been held out to him when he was consecrated as monk. But the fact that many eminent and respected hierarchs, for example, Patriarch Pimen himself,

⁴On the most recent history of the Russian Orthodox Church see the excellent work by Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* (London, 1986).

Metropolitan Nikodim (Rusnak), and the senior bishop (by date of episcopal consecration), Metropolitan Ioann (Razumov), received no theological training in the seminaries but were monks, shows that the Moscow Patriarchate takes monasticism completely seriously and not merely as a "formal preliminary" for the office of bishop. Of course, not all bishops lived permanently in monasteries as monks; many assumed pastoral duties or were involved in church administration. (There are currently seven monasteries in the Soviet Union; apart from the Holy Trinity-St Sergi *lavra* in Zagorsk and the new Danilov monastery in Moscow, the others are all in areas which formerly did not belong to the Soviet Union.) The fact that bishops are monks does not necessarily mean that they are more compliant to the state because of their oath of obedience — the opposite would be more likely, for their obedience is directed only towards their spiritual father.

Today's bishops have received better theological training than their predecessors. Admittedly, the number of seminaries has dropped from eight in the 1950s to three now, but the overall number of students has increased. The academies in Leningrad and Moscow (Zagorsk) still remain and their theological level has improved. Of the bishops currently in office, fifty have achieved the academic grade of Candidate of Theology (slightly lower than a doctorate in the West), three bishops (Leonti Bondar, Mikhail Mudyugin and Sergi Petrov) the higher grade of Master, and one (Metropolitan Leonid Polyakov) the highest, that of Doctor of Theology. The latter, incidentally, is also a qualified medical doctor. Five bishops were trained abroad, one of whom bears the title of Doctor of Theology of the University of Warsaw. Four bishops attended only the seminary, not the academy, and another four did not even attend a seminary. Six bishops did in fact conclude their studies at the academy, but without an academic degree. The patriarchate established a correspondence course at the academies for priests engaged in pastoral duties to receive further training: 15 bishops completed their training in this way.

The seminary course lasts four years. The students live as if in a family, in something like a (Western) monastic order (there are no orders in the Orthodox Church). Lectures are on theological, pastoral and historical basics as well as ancient and modern languages; and in the third and fourth years exegesis, dogmatics, moral theology, apologetics, other denominations, and homiletics, as well as the Constitution and history of the USSR are included. In the academy, where the course also lasts four years, the knowledge already acquired is deepened and, among other things, patristics, church law, Byzantine studies, archaeology, logic and literary composition are added. The focal point of the study and education, however, is the

place of worship, prayer and the liturgy.⁵

An innovation, in about 1962, was the *aspirantura*, or post-graduate course, which takes in graduates of the Moscow Academy. This is a special course to prepare young scholars for a second dissertation and lasts three years (as from 1963). Graduates of the course are placed primarily in ecumenical work and they appear to receive some kind of political training so as to arm them with loyalty to the state in their ecumenical contacts with the West. About 17 of the present bishops have completed the *aspirantura*.

About twenty bishops served in the Red Army before or during their training. Fourteen were employed in the Department of External Church Relations before their appointment as bishop, and eight served in the Church's Spiritual Mission in Jerusalem.

Critics maintain that the level of education in the church's training institutes is not particularly high. Above all, they say, it does not prepare the priests and candidate bishops sufficiently for practical pastoral care, a fault which tends to perpetuate the existing gulf between the people and the bishop.⁶ However, these criticisms are voiced in the West too. The people do not seem to set such great store by a particularly high level of theological training — for a Russian believer it is far more important that a bishop should celebrate the liturgy piously and solemnly and perhaps also preach well. Many other failings are then excused, be it excessively close co-operation with the state authorities or even some moral failure. There is a Russian saying: "Even a bad bishop can ordain a hundred good priests."⁷

What probably interests Westerners most when meeting Russian Orthodox bishops, and perhaps also makes them uncertain, is the attitude of these bishops to the Soviet state. The Soviet Constitution guarantees every Soviet citizen the right to profess his faith and belong to a religious association, and conversely, the right to promulgate atheist propaganda and profess no religion, that is, to be an atheist. It is evident that the state and the party are interested in "overcoming remnants of religious prejudice", and this is emphasised time and again at every party conference. The history of the Russian Orthodox

⁵V. Feodorov, "The Contemporary Life of the Russian Orthodox Church", in *The Orthodox Church in Russia*, Archbishop Pitirim of Volokolamsk, with photographs by Fred Mayer (London, 1982) pp. 239ff.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 246; cf. also V. Furov "Iz otcheta po delam religii — chlenam Ts. K. KPSS. Tserkovnye kadry i mery po ogranicheniyu ikh deyatel'nosti ramkami zakona", *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniya*, No. 130 (1979), pp. 284ff.; Father Gleb Yakunin, "O sovremennom polozhenii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi i perspektivakh religioznogo vozrozhdeniya Rossii", *samizdat in Vol'noye slovo* No. 35-36, 1979, pp. 51ff.: some subjects are even taught by atheist lecturers.

⁷Fairy von Lilienfeld, "Russisch-Orthodoxe Bischöfe in den ersten Jahrzehnten des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts", *Ostkirchliche Studien*, No. 35 (1986), p. 154.

Church since the Revolution, with its persecutions, closed churches and the number of bishops who perished or disappeared, confirms this. A large proportion of the present-day bishops experienced such times before 1943 and later under Khrushchev. When, in 1961, the Council of Bishops decided, doubtless as a result of government pressure, that priests should no longer have a voice on parish councils but only be responsible for the services — which made it “legally” possible to close many churches — Archbishop Yermogen (Golubev) was at first able to collect ten bishops’ signatures for a letter of protest, but most of them later withdrew their signatures; only two of them, Archbishops Pavel (Golyshev) and Veniamin (Novitsky), were prepared to sign.⁸ [See *Chronicle* item on pp. 318-20 for further comment — *Ed.*]

Reports by dissidents, such as Father Gleb Yakunin’s “Current Situation of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Prospects for a Religious Renaissance in Russia”,⁹ are not alone in confirming that nowadays the Patriarch, the Holy Synod, and the individual bishops and priests are all subject to extremely strict supervision by the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) and its local commissioners throughout the USSR; the party’s own reports confirm this too. In 1979 a report was published in the West which was compiled by V. Furov, a deputy chairman of the CRA, and was intended for members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ This report covered the year 1974-75 and is thus 12 years out of date. Granted, it is not truly objective. It belongs to the genre of “success stories” customary in socialist states and especially in the Soviet Union, in that it claims that the work of “church cadres” could, within the framework of existing legislation, be successfully restricted by the active involvement of the commissioners of the CRA! It is clear from both reports, however, that not only the patriarch, bishops and priests, but also the monasteries and church training institutes are completely under state control. No candidate priest is admitted to the seminary, no bishop appointed, no-one transferred to another diocese, no-one allowed to travel abroad, without the approval of the commissioner. If a bishop is too zealous, if he preaches too well, if he ordains too many priests and deacons, if he is too concerned about young people, he will be summoned to appear before the commissioner and warned accordingly; if this has no effect, he can expect to be transferred, according to both Furov and Yakunin.

Of course, this does not mean that all the present bishops in the

⁸Yakunin, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21.

⁹*loc. cit.*

¹⁰*loc. cit.*

Soviet Union are compliant servants of the communist state, or even spies. Furov divided the hierarchs who were then in office into three groups, according to their attitude to the state and Soviet society: 1) bishops who are not only loyal in word and deed to Soviet society, but who are patriotic, abide strictly by the laws and understand that the state is not interested in strengthening the role of religion and the church, and who therefore undertake no special activity for the good of the church and the faith; 2) bishops who are in fact loyal to the state and act correctly according to the laws on cults, but who in the course of their work endeavour to stimulate priests and congregations and win young people to the church; 3) bishops who try to get round the laws on cults, to deceive the authorities or even to bribe them.¹¹

Of the 57 bishops named by Furov, there were at most 17 (the first group) who — in the judgement of party officials — could be regarded as wanting to co-operate “actively” with the state. Furov also named young bishops who were causing him concern because they were demonstrating great zeal, even though they had been prepared for work abroad by the *aspirantura* course and had at times been called upon to work abroad. Nonetheless, they were now displaying great religious fervour in the Soviet Union, representing the church in a good light to foreign visitors, building up good church choirs and ordaining priests. They criticised the decisions of the 1961 Council of Bishops — Archbishop Mikhail (Mudyugin) being one such critic — and demanded more rights for the church and religious associations.

Furov takes as evidence of the bishops’ particular loyalty to the Soviet state quotations by the patriarch and other hierarchs which demonstrate their patriotism and love of peace. But do Furov and the bishops really mean the same thing by patriotism and love of peace? Many official statements by the patriarch on contemporary world affairs, for example, his Open Letter to President Reagan on nuclear weapons (10 June 1986)¹² do indeed seem to confirm that he is espousing the *pax sovietica* in entirely the same sense as the Soviet government. On the other hand, it is quite evident from the literature produced by Russian Orthodox theologians to mark the millennium of the Baptism of Rus’ that what they and the bishops mean by patriotism is love of *Russia*. They repeatedly emphasise — much to the annoyance of official state sources and historians¹³ — the leading

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79. Of the hierarchs named here, 26 are still alive; 15 still administer the same dioceses.

¹² *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 1986 No. 7, pp. 7-9.

¹³ A number of works have already appeared to counteract the “mystification and glorification” of the role of the Orthodox Church in the history of Russia, e.g. V. A. Zots, *Pravoslaviye i kultura: fakty protiv domyslov* (Kiev, 1986); L. I. Yemelyakh & Ya. Ya. Kozurin, *Sovetskaya istoricheskaya nauka o kreshchenii Rusi* (Moscow, 1985); N. M. Nikol’sky, *Istoriya Russkoi Tserkvi* (3rd edition; Moscow, 1985); N. Gordiyenko, *Kreshcheniye Rusi. Fakty protiv legend* (Leningrad, 1984).

role of the Orthodox Church in the history of Russia, its achievements for the culture and education of the Russian people and its moral strengthening of the people in the struggle for their freedom and existence. According to Metropolitan Pitirim, for example, this applies equally to the early years of Soviet power, which were "a time of great sacrifice for the whole of Russia".

From the beginning of World War I to the early 1920s the nation lost ten million people. But since its inception, the church had instilled within the Russian people a readiness to endure suffering and self-sacrifice, all of which gave believers the capacity and the power to withstand terrible trials.¹⁴

The church's concern for the people — especially young people — is, it is claimed, still valid today:

Like the Western Church, Russian Orthodoxy is concerned with the problems of contemporary youth. Even here, rather than encourage a superficial confession of faith, the church tries to help young people avoid sin, to nourish and strengthen the will to be good in those who approach "troubled and burdened". The church rejoices in the multitude of its children, mourns their losses, and prayerfully cares for the faint of heart and the prodigal; it fortifies the ill, the advanced in years, the lonely, and all who grieve. Slowly but surely, such acts of mercy give service to the community, and as each of them bears witness to the truths of Orthodoxy, it gradually restores the individual to his original state, before the injury of sin. The Russian Church is a living organism, a society of believers all closely involved in the whole of contemporary Soviet society.¹⁵

The church's help for the "troubled and burdened" referred to by Metropolitan Pitirim is doubtless to be understood more as spiritual and moral help; for hardly any charitable or financial help by the church or its bishops and priests is permitted (except pensions for priests). A good deal of money finds its way into the Soviet Peace Fund, about which Patriarch Pimen is especially enthusiastic.¹⁶ Since church and state are separated, the bishops naturally do not receive any money from the state; the church lives solely from the offerings of the faithful and from the sale of ritual objects, principally candles.

So the Russian bishops are loyal to the Soviet state, or, rather, to their homeland and motherland. In reply to a naïve question by a Western Christian, "Do you love the Soviet Union?", a Russian

¹⁴Pitirim, *The Orthodox Church* p. 49.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 53ff.

¹⁶Yakunin, *op. cit.*, pp. 56ff.

Orthodox priest once replied very aptly and tellingly: "You know, my wife is certainly no Brigitte Bardot — but I love her. It's like that with the Soviet Union too."

Many Christians in the West, when meeting Russian Orthodox Christians and especially bishops, overlook the fact that as a result of their Byzantine and Russian tradition their Russian counterparts have a different relationship to the state and the authorities than do Western Christians, particularly Roman Catholics; and this applies even when, as now, these authorities are atheist.

In contrast to the West, in Byzantine theological and national thinking state and church were not divided or even divisible institutions but were different manifestations of one and the same Christendom — each one unthinkable without the other. The idea of a dual authority, such as had developed in the West, was inconceivable in Byzantium. Where there appeared to be moves in this direction, it was not a matter of rivalry between two "perfect societies" but a ratio of distribution. In Christendom, the emperor, just like the bishop or priest, was seen as a bearer of the spirit in a special sense. Although he did not, of course, embrace the specific liturgical and sacramental aspects of the priesthood, his ambit was far-reaching, so that practically all jurisdiction in church affairs stemmed from him. The only limit to the emperor's power in this area of jurisdiction was his Orthodoxy. The problem of the emperor's power was not, in the Byzantine church, a problem of Caesaropapism, which always presupposes a rivalry between two independent institutions, one of which is loath to allow the other its independence. The emperor's power in the church was an element of church tradition.¹⁷ There was no question of a "division between church and state", much less a clerical subjection of the state to the power of the church; instead, the idea of a symphony (*symphonia*) between the two developed.¹⁸

This co-operation between church and state remained characteristic of the Russian Church, which received its Christian faith 1,000 years ago from Byzantium; and, far more than in Byzantium itself, this co-operation took the form of an extensive tutelage of the church by the state. After the Union of Florence of 1439 between Byzantium and Rome, and then the fall of Constantinople in 1453, an event which shook the whole Christian world, Russians developed a new church-state theory, that of "Moscow the Third Rome". The Russian Church finally became a national church and became dependent on the secular power, the state. The final subjection of the church and its bishops took place under Peter the Great, when the patriarchate was

¹⁷H. -G.- Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), p. 36.

¹⁸A. Shmeman, *Istorichesky put' Pravoslaviya* (Paris, 1985), p. 36.

abolished and replaced by the Holy Synod, controlled by the chief administrator, and the priests and bishops were forced, to a certain extent, into the role of state officials.¹⁹

An anonymous *samizdat* author²⁰ from Moscow depicts another peculiarity of the Russian person and character, which seems for him important in attempting to understand the present situation of the church in the Soviet Union and the behaviour of its bishops. It is, he writes, the "inability to take the middle way", a trait discerned by Yuri Krizhanich at the end of the 16th century. This resulted in the Russian people adopting Orthodoxy in its most conservative forms, confusing the living Jesus with the cult of the Church Fathers. They accepted humbly the doctrine of subjection to every authority, as well as fear of those who believed any differently and fear of new forms of church life. In short, they uncritically accepted tradition in its utmost severity as a precept. A second characteristic of the Russian people, more important here, is what the same anonymous author sees as the peculiar nature of Slavic communalism (*obshchina*), as expressed in the *mir*, or village community, with its general equality — in contrast to the Roman or Germanic community, where the original inequality had necessitated a careful, precise codification of relationships common to all. This factor resulted later in documents such as general human rights declarations remaining undeveloped in the eastern Slavic communities. This probably also explains the eastern Slavs' inadequate understanding of democracy and the barely-defined need for individual freedom as we understand it in the West. In particular, however, the writer cites "the amorphous community awareness and the undeveloped sense of personal responsibility (to God for the community and to the community for God and one's neighbour)".

Of course, one should not overemphasise the extent to which Russian bishops and believers have been imbued with the Byzantine tradition described above with regard to their relationship to the state, and certainly one should not place undue emphasis on the above-mentioned tradition of the *mir*. In the final analysis, every bishop is himself responsible for what he does and does not do, each one has his own character, his own training, his own personal experiences to draw on and his own background. One has greater courage of his convictions, another less.

What would have become of the Russian Orthodox Church if, for example, during the patriarchal election at the Local Council of 1917-18 the lot had not fallen upon Tikhon, a prudent man more

¹⁹Pitirim, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 23; Roman Rössler, "Moskau, das Dritte Rom — heute", in *Kyrios*, 1962 No. 2, pp. 36-47.

²⁰"Sem' voprosov i otvetov o Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi. Otvety na samizdat'skuyu anketu", in *Vestnik RKhD*, No. 137 (1982), pp. 233-60.

likely to be willing to compromise, but on one of the other two nominated candidates, the courageous and energetic Metropolitan Antoni (Khrapovitsky)?²¹ Almost certainly, he would have put up more resistance to the persecution of the church — but whether this would have been more successful we do not know. Yet he too was utterly steeped in Byzantine tradition and devoted to the state — albeit the Tsarist state. (He subsequently became supreme head of the opposition church overseas.)

Why do the patriarchal church and its bishops appear not to remember the times of persecution? Why do the bishops hide the fact that the church and they themselves are completely under the control of party organs? Why do they accept at all what is from many points of view such a precarious existence for the church in the Soviet state — a state which, on the basis of the Byzantine tradition outlined above, they should not even recognise, since it has renounced not only Orthodoxy but any profession of faith whatsoever? It must surely be from the conviction that without their silence this compromise with the state, and thus the external existence of the church within the Soviet state, would be inconceivable.²² Patriarch Tikhon and his successor, Metropolitan, and later Patriarch, Sergi (Stragorodsky), recognised this, which is why in 1927 the latter called for loyal co-operation with the state. Patriarch Alexi (Simansky) learned it to his cost: he once described the precarious situation of the church in the Soviet Union quite openly and reminded his listeners of the church's leading role in the history of Russia — he was hissed off the stage and became the indirect cause of the sudden downfall of his possible successor, Metropolitan Nikolai (Yarushevich).²³ The present Patriarch, Pimen, knows this too. In many respects he enjoys even less freedom of movement than his predecessors — and it is sometimes said of him that he is resigned to this and feels as if he is in a “golden cage”.²⁴

The patriarch and bishops can endure this silence only because of their firm belief in God's providence as well as their inner sacramental experience of the new creation which has dawned in the resurrection of Christ, that is, in the forgiving, loving, and blessing attitude of the church made possible by this certainty of victory.²⁵

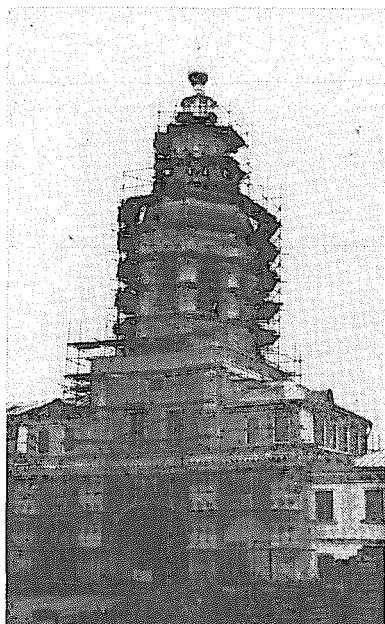
²¹ Archbishop Antoni (Khrapovitsky) received 159 votes of 309 cast and was thus the first candidate. Metropolitan Tikhon received 125 votes as third candidate. The final choice between the three candidates was made by drawing lots. Cf. John Chrysostomus OSB, *Kirchengeschichte Rußlands der neuesten Zeit* (Munich, 1965), Vol. 1, p. 97.

²² Rössler, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

²³ Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church under the Soviet Regime 1917-1982* (Crestwood, NY, 1984), pp. 333ff.

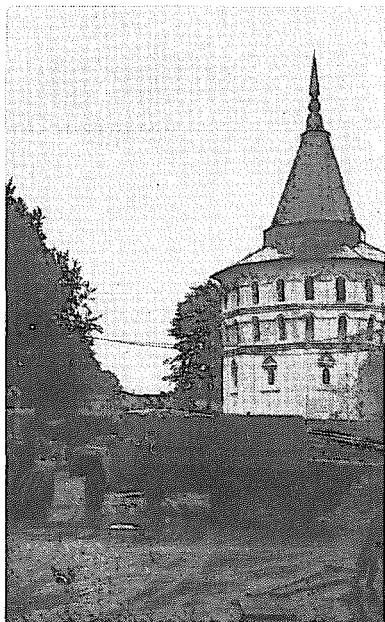
²⁴ Yakunin, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

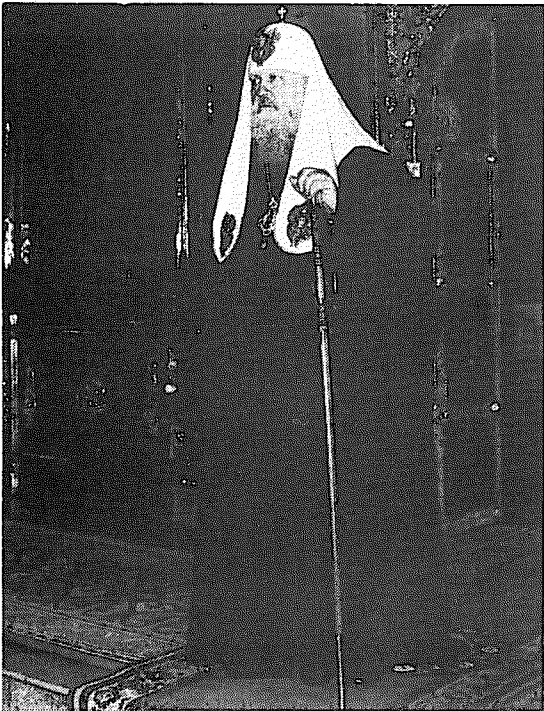
²⁵ Edmund Schlink, “Der ökumenische Beitrag der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche”, *Kerygma und Dogma*, 1958, p. 202.



The Danilov Monastery in Moscow, currently undergoing extensive renovation. The main millennium celebration service is planned to take place here on 10 June 1988.

(Photos courtesy James Stark)





Patriarch Pimen, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, who is due to preside over the millennium celebrations next year.



Crowds at worship.

(Photo courtesy Keston College)

The history of the Russian Orthodox Church reveals the continuous creativity of God-Man. At every turn, even the most inscrutable events are blessed with the influence of Divine Providence on earth . . . It is not, however, the earthly house of God that has strengthened the Church through all ages, but rather the Church's constant inner struggle, its suffering and torment, and the voluntary sacrifice in the name of Christ. The believing nation of Russia has lived and will continue to live through the immutable "joys of the spirit and mind", joys from God . . .²⁶

The "earthly house of God" of the Russian Orthodox Church is still intact today — after seventy years of Soviet rule in Russia the number of bishops is normal, they can administer their dioceses, pursue inter-denominational relations and make preparations to celebrate the millennium of the Baptism of Rus' at an international level. The Danilov Monastery in Moscow has been returned to the church and a new publishing house established. Also, just a few churches have been built with permission. Today we look forward to *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost'* (openness). Of course, ultimately, all this is purchased with silence. The religious and church dissidents in the Soviet Union, who, out of their concern for the future of the church and their love for her, criticise the patriarch and bishops, know this too. They are hoping and struggling for *vozhzhdeniye*, the rebirth of Christian belief and the renewal of the church in the Soviet Union. They know that it will not happen without the "external organisation", without the patriarch and bishops, without training institutes and the few remaining monasteries, no matter how much they may all be under state control.²⁷ People with atheist parents, brought up to be completely a-religious, are being converted and seeking their refuge and the forgiveness of their sins, as Tat'yana Goricheva writes and proclaims in the West, in the official church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Moscow Patriarchate.²⁸ There they receive religious instruction, baptism, the forgiveness of sins, the sacraments.

Despite all the criticisms of individual bishops in particular, and of the "Soviet" type of bishop in general,²⁹ the dissidents and critics know that their bishops stand between a godless power and the

²⁶ Pitirim, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 56.

²⁷ "Sem' voprosov . . .", p. 258.

²⁸ Tat'yana Goricheva, *Talking About God is Dangerous: My Experiences in the East and in the West* (London, 1986); *Die Rettung der Verlorenen: Bekenntnisse* (Wuppertal, 1985).

²⁹ "Un Mémoire du P. Vsévolode Spiller au Métropolitte Nicodème", *Contacts: Revue Française de l'Orthodoxie*, Vol. 18, No. 53 (1966), pp. 213-28.

faithful, that they receive the first blows and the first wounds, "risk their souls for us". The faithful pray that their bishops may always know how far they should go:

The bishop builds up church life in his diocese; of course he must strive with all his might to twist around his finger the Commissioner for Religious Affairs for his region and to ordain more and more priests; he must aspire to be a splendid and very spiritual preacher and not just a distinguished "prince" sparkling with gold and showering incense who descends from time to time to visit the parishes. Above all, the bishop has to be fully aware of the limits to which he can go. He must know where "that which is Caesar's" ends and "that which is God's" begins, and if Caesar demands the latter for himself, then the bishop must be willing to suffer martyrdom.³⁰

The dissidents and faithful know that they have no right to condemn their outwardly passive and fettered episcopate — they can only pray for this difficult mission and the fate of their bishops. "Christianity is a religion of God incarnate. The bishops hope not only in Christ but also in us."³¹

Perhaps this applies to us Christians in the West as well. Perhaps the Russian bishops are risking their souls for us too, we who in our materialistic environment are in no less danger of "going too far" and leaving the boundary of faith. The Russian bishops hope for our understanding and our prayers as well. That they and the church are under pressure, that the religious liberty guaranteed in the Soviet Constitution is not experienced in practice, these are matters about which we do not need to ask them. But such questions may perhaps enable them to report back to the Council for Religious Affairs that foreigners are not convinced by the propagandistic line which they take, even though they may have adhered to the Council's instructions.

³⁰ "Sem' voprosov" p. 258.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.