

# The True Orthodox Church of Russia

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For the last 60 years or more, the existence of the True Orthodox Church has been one of the best-kept secrets of Soviet 'reality'. The 'True Orthodox', or 'Catacomb', or 'Tikhonite' Church claims to be the direct descendant of the Russian Orthodox Church as it existed before the revolution and in the first decade after the revolution under Patriarch Tikhon and his successor, the *locum tenens* of the patriarchal throne, Metropolitan Petr of Krutitsy. In 1927, however, the True Orthodox argue, power in the Russian Church was usurped by one of the senior hierarchs, Metropolitan Sergi of Nizhni Novgorod, who issued a declaration in which he thanked the Soviet state for its great services to Orthodoxy, declared that the Soviet state's joys were the church's joys and its sorrows the church's sorrows, and placed himself in more or less unconditional submission to the atheist state. This declaration was rejected not only by Metropolitan Petr, the lawful head of the Russian Orthodox Church (in prison at that time), but also by most of the senior bishops of the church and a large proportion of the faithful (90 per cent of the parishes in the Urals, for example). The schism thus created was vigorously exploited and deepened by the KGB, who sent to the camps or shot any bishop or priest who did not accept the declaration of Metropolitan Sergi, and with the active support of Sergi, who denounced his opponents as 'counter-revolutionaries' — the equivalent of a death sentence in those terrible times. So those who rejected the declaration were forced to go underground, forming what came to be called the True Orthodox Church.<sup>1</sup>

The True Orthodox justify their separation from the Moscow Patriarchate on the following grounds:

<sup>1</sup>See Arfed Gustavson, *The Catacomb Church*, (Holy Trinity Monastery Press: Jordanville, N.Y., 1960); William C. Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917-70*, (Oxford University Press: London, 1971); I. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, (St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press: Platina Ca., 1982).

1. The true leader of the Russian Orthodox Church until his death in 1937 was Metropolitan Petr, and he did not recognise Metropolitan Sergi's declaration or his uncanonical usurpation of the powers of the *locum tenens*. Loyalty to Metropolitan Petr therefore requires non-recognition of Metropolitan, later 'Patriarch' Sergi and his successors Aleksii I, Pimen and Aleksii II. The patriarchal elections of 1943, 1945, 1971 and 1990 were in any case uncanonical, the first three flagrantly so.

2. In January 1918, Patriarch Tikhon anathematised Soviet power; and his decree was confirmed by the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church then in session. Having entered into a close union with the Soviet authorities, Metropolitan Sergi fell under Patriarch Tikhon's anathema. He also fell under Patriarch Tikhon's 1923 anathema against the Living Church, because the present-day Moscow Patriarchate is in essence the child and continuation of the Living Church (Patriarchs Sergi and Aleksii I were both former living-churchmen).

3. The consequences of Sergi's pact with the Soviet authorities have been disastrous for the church. These consequences include: control by the KGB and the Council for Religious Affairs of every aspect of church life, including the appointments of bishops and priests; infiltration of KGB agents into seminaries and parish councils and higher levels of church life; shameful lying by senior hierarchs about the true state of the church, both at home and abroad; equally shameful glorification by these hierarchs of the Soviet state and its leaders (the Moscow Patriarchate has only recently begun to criticise Stalin, much later than the Communist Party); lack of resistance by the hierarchs to the closing and destruction of churches; refusal by the hierarchs to help persecuted believers, and even attacks on them as 'political criminals'; failure to educate converts to the faith, and especially children; preaching of a kind of 'Communist Christianity'; entrance into the World Council of Churches and the heretical ecumenical movement.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1930s almost all the bishops of the True Orthodox Church were shot or perished in the camps. Metropolitan Petr died in exile in Northern Siberia in 1936. Metropolitan Iosif of Petrograd and Kirill of Kazan', the *de facto* leaders of the True Orthodox Church after the death of Petr, were shot together in Chimkent in

<sup>2</sup>See Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, (Croom Helm: London & Sydney, 1986) part 2; *id.*, 'Hierarchs and Dissidents: Conflict over the Future of the Russian Orthodox Church', *Religion in Communist Lands*, Vol. 18 No. 4 (Winter, 1990), pp. 307-18. See also the interviews with the former chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs Kharchev in *Ogonek*, No. 44, October 1989, with Fr Sergi Popov in *Moscow News*, No. 23, 10 June 1990, and with Fr Georgii Edelshtein in *Svobodnaya Rossiya*, No. 95 (2) (30 June 1990).

1937, according to the catacomb monk and theologian now living in the West, Fr Antoni Chernov. But in the same year a group of six True Orthodox bishops and several priests and lay people found themselves 'by chance' in the same detention cell in Ust-Kut, Siberia. They decided immediately to convene a Council, at which they reaffirmed Patriarch Tikhon's anathema, and themselves anathematised all those who regard that anathema as an ecclesiastical mistake or political manoeuvre.<sup>3</sup>

In these years the basic pattern of the life of the True Orthodox Church was established: small communities of believers living in the strictest secrecy, served by priests who wandered from village to village disguised as carpenters or stove-menders. Catacomb believers resisted collectivisation, did not vote in elections, and in general played no part in Soviet life if they could help it. One bishop, Amfilokhi of Krasnoyarsk and Yeniseisk, even decided to leave civilisation altogether and go into the *taiga* where he remained until his death in 1946. Since the bishops were in such deep hiding, a great part in the leadership of the church was played by the *startsy* and *staritsy*, elders with prophetic gifts. One such *staritsa*, Mother Agafa of Belorussia, was starved to death by the communists in 1939 at the age of 119 — but not before prophesying the eventual fall of Soviet power and the triumph of the True Orthodox Church in the Russian land.<sup>4</sup>

The Second World War brought another form of martyrdom for the catacomb believers. Young men refused to join the Red Army 'to defend the achievements of October', and were immediately shot. However, in areas occupied by the Germans the True Orthodox Church flourished.<sup>5</sup> The growth in catacomb activity was testified to by the exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate in the Baltic republics, Metropolitan Sergi (Voskresensky), in a secret memorandum to the German authorities in 1941.<sup>6</sup> This was probably one of the reasons why, in 1943, Stalin decided to give some concessions to the Moscow Patriarchate, in order to increase its influence in the German-occupied areas.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Metropolitan Sergi was 'elected' to the patriarchate, some churches and seminaries were reopened, and the patriarchate acquired a semi-legal status. After the death of Sergi, in January 1945, the

<sup>3</sup>Fr Antoni Chernov, personal communication. See also B. Zakharov, *Russkaya mysl'*, 7 September 1949.

<sup>4</sup>Andreyev, *op. cit.*, chap. 28.

<sup>5</sup>Fr Antoni Chernov, *Katakombnaya Tserkov' na rossiiskoi zemle* (MS); Andreyev, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

<sup>6</sup>Translated in *Eastern Churches Review*, Autumn 1974, pp. 135-61.

<sup>7</sup>See Fr Gleb Yakunin, 'V sluzhenii kul'tu (Moskovskaya Patriarkhiya i kul't lichnosti Stalina)', *Na puti k svobode sovesti*, (Progress: Moscow, 1989), p. 189.

second Soviet patriarch, Aleksii, was 'elected' (he was the only candidate). Aleksii's reign was characterised by, on the one hand, idolisation of the 'most wise', 'God-sent' 'father of the peoples' — Stalin, and the greatest ferocity towards the True Orthodox Church on the other. Thus according to Professor Ivan Andreyev, himself a former '*katakombnik*', all secret priests found in the Soviet zone of Germany were shot, and all the priests already in prison were given the choice: either accept patriarch Aleksii and be released, or have another term in prison.<sup>8</sup>

Our information about the True Orthodox Church in the postwar period is very scanty. Occasional reports of trials of True Orthodox Christians appeared in the provincial Soviet press, and such atheist publications as *The Atheist's Dictionary* had entries under 'The True Orthodox Christians' and 'The True Orthodox Church'. Moreover, sociologists from the University of Voronezh conducted studies of the True Orthodox Christians in the Tambov area, one of the strongholds of the church.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes reports about great heroes of the church appeared in the West. Thus we heard about the great wonderworking priest Mikhail Yershov, born into a family of Bolsheviks in 1911 and nicknamed 'the Tsar of Mordovia', who was in various prisons, camps and psychiatric hospitals from 1931 to 1974 for refusing to recognise the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>10</sup> Again, there was Metropolitan Gennadi (Sekach), who formed a network of underground monasteries and even a seminary in the Caucasus, but was betrayed by an informer in 1976.<sup>11</sup>

In 1978 the catacomb monk and theologian Fr Antoni Chernov appeared in the West. He reported that in his wanderings throughout the Soviet Union he had met about 200 priests of the True Orthodox Church but never a bishop. He spoke about the very high level of Christian life in the True Orthodox Church — both among monks and married people.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Professor Ivan Andreyev, 'The Catacomb Church in the Soviet Union', *Orthodox Life* (Jordanville, N.Y.), March-April 1951.

<sup>9</sup> See A. I. Klibanov, 'Sovremennoye sektantstvo v Tambovskoi oblasti', *Voprosy istorii religii i ateizma, sbornik statei VIII*, (Akademiya Nauk, 1960); L. N. Mitrokhin, 'Reaktsionnaya deyatel'nost' "Istinno-Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi" na Tambovshchine', *Voprosy istorii religii i ateizma: Sovremennoye sektantsvo*, (Akademiya Nauk, 1961); 'Les Vrais Chrétiens Orthodoxes dans le district de Tambov', *Catacombes*, June 1972, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Les Cahiers du Samizdat*, No. 49 (January 1978); No. 51 (April 1978); Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, pp. 560, 562.

<sup>11</sup> Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, chap. 40; *Keston News Service*, No. 282 (20 August 1987), p. 6. The present author is in possession of a manuscript life of Metropolitan Gennadi.

<sup>12</sup> Chernov, interview with Jane Ellis of Keston College, 13 July 1980; 'Secret Church in Exile', *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 January 1981.

In 1980 Yuri Belov reported:

In prison I also met some Orthodox priests. . . A number of them were True Orthodox preachers, of whom two were unforgettable: Fr Ivan (Krivushchev) and Fr Mikhail (Kalinin). They did not recognise the satanic authorities and did not want to hide the fact. On the contrary — they went along the Volga from village to village and preached that salvation would come to the world from a struggle with ‘the Bolshevik devil’. They called on people not to work for the Bolsheviks, but to go into the woods, not to serve in the Soviet army, and not to read satanic newspapers and books, for through them, and through the cinema and radio, ‘a great deception comes’. Krivushchev is now serving his last ten-year term at the age of 80. Kalinin has not been freed either; he is now about 63. If a chekist or a simple overseer appeared, he signed everything around with the sign of the cross and proclaimed: ‘Get out, satan! Perish the Bolshevik filth!’ He absolutely did not want to talk with them and said that if everyone rejected ‘these commissars’ they would not remain in power even for a year.<sup>13</sup>

Although True Orthodox Christians are characterised by a rejection of the Soviet system and a veneration for the martyred Tsar Nicholas II and his family, it is a mistake to describe them as a politically orientated sect, as Soviet writers frequently do. Their opposition to the Soviet system is based on strictly religious considerations, on the incompatibility between Soviet ideology and the Christian faith, and on Patriarch Tikhon’s anathema against Soviet power. Nor is it correct to describe them as ‘counter-revolutionaries’ in the sense that they advocate war and physical violence against the regime. Their opposition to the regime is spiritual and non-violent. They are rather the victims of violence than its proponents.

Their numbers are unknown. Since they live in conditions of the strictest secrecy, True Orthodox Christians living in one house often do not know of the existence of another ‘cell’ of the church in a next-door house. All we can be certain of is that the church, although small in numbers by comparison with the official Moscow Patriarchate, is to be found in all parts of the Soviet Union and in all social strata except the Communist Party.

The British sociologist Christel Lane makes the following interesting comment on the True Orthodox Church:

Neglect to study the sect on the part of Soviet atheists and social scientists as well as on that of Western religious circles gives the impression that during the last decade the sect has been

<sup>13</sup> Belov, ‘Syashchenniki v lageryakh’, *Posev*, 1980 No. 5, pp. 26-28.

insignificant. But this impression is false and is probably only due to the facts that the sect is clandestine and does not have any ties with other religious organisations or Western sympathisers. The few data we possess, however, show that the sect is not insignificant in numerical terms nor lacking in vitality. . .<sup>14</sup>

As regards age composition, the True Orthodox Church offers a strong contrast to the Moscow Patriarchate, which is heavily weighted towards the older age-group. According to Dem'yanov,<sup>15</sup> most True Orthodox Christians are in the middle age range; and in Moscow today, according to the observations of the present author, the average age of the True Orthodox Christian is well below 40.

The structure of the True Orthodox Church, as explained above, is molecular, and it has never had a single ecclesiastical organisation. There are at present five major groups or branches of the church:

1. The 'Tikhonite' branch, so called because it claims apostolic succession from Patriarch Tikhon, who early in 1925 secretly ordained Bishop Serafim (Pozdeyev). Serafim was in the camps from 1925 to 1956. Then he settled in Buzuluk, where, shortly before his death in 1971, he consecrated Bishop Gennadi (Sekach) with the written agreement of another True Orthodox bishop, Alfei. It is from Gennadi and Alfei that most of the contemporary bishops of the 'Tikhonite' church derived their orders. After Gennadi's death in 1987, the leadership of the church passed to Metropolitan Feodosi and Metropolitan Yepifani.

2. The 'Isaakiite' branch, a very recent schism from the Tikhonites. In the summer of 1990, the Tikhonite bishops Isaaki and Antoni consecrated two vicar-bishops for Isaaki, Ilarion and Afanasi, without the knowledge or blessing of the other bishops. For this, and for some other reasons, Bishops Isaaki and Antoni were defrocked, and the consecrations they had carried out declared invalid, by a Council of four Tikhonite bishops and several priests meeting in Belorussia on 15 January 1991.

3. A group of about nine priests who were ordained by Bishop Antoni (Galynsky), but who have not sought to come within the jurisdiction of any other bishop since his death in 1976. This group, though without bishops, is reported to have some large parishes.

4. The 'passportless', so called because they refuse to carry Soviet passports. Probably the strictest and most uncompromising branch of the True Orthodox Church, they number some thousands scattered through Eastern European Russia and Siberia. Their last bishop, Feodosi (Bakhmetev), died in 1986. Now they are served by a single

<sup>14</sup>Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union* (George Allen & Unwin: London, 1978) p. 89.

<sup>15</sup>*Istinnoye Pravoslavnoye Khristianstvo* (Voronezh University Press, 1977).

84-year-old Chuvash priest, Archimandrite Guri. On the insistence of his flock, Fr Guri recently took a passport and sought consecration from the Russian Church Abroad in New York. However, although the emigre bishops agreed to consecrate him, he refused on learning that Bishop Lazar of Tambov (see below, No. 7) would be among the consecrators. In July 1991, Fr Guri travelled to Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, USA at the invitation of the branch of the True Orthodox Church of Greece led by Archbishop Auxentios of Athens. There, on 28 July, he was consecrated to the episcopate by Metropolitan Maximos and Bishops Ephraim and Makarios. However, not all of Bishop Guri's flock have accepted his decision to seek consecration from Archbishop Auxentios' Synod, and some of his parishes have been supplied with priests by another branch of the True Orthodox Church of Greece, that led by Archbishop Andreas of Athens. The third, and largest, branch of the True Orthodox Church of Greece, that led by Archbishop Chrysostom of Athens, has so far refused to intervene, although the 'passportless' appealed to them first of all.<sup>16</sup> The intervention of the True Orthodox Church of Greece (sometimes called 'the Old Calendarists') into the affairs of the Russian Church is a significant new development. It remains to be seen whether this intervention will be beneficial.

5. A heretical group which believes in a 'Third Covenant of the Mother of God'. To this group, according to Zoya Krakhmal'nikova, belongs the Fr Konstantin Vasil'ev of the Cathedral of the Dormition in Kashira who in August 1990 announced to his patriarchal parish that he was Bishop Lazar of the True Orthodox Church. In February, Bishop (not Archbishop) Lazar (not to be confused with Archbishop Lazar of the Free Russian Orthodox Church (FROC) *see below*) applied to join the Russian Church Abroad. It appears that his application has not been accepted.<sup>17</sup>

6. Bishop Vikenti of Tula, who has a former Tikhonite priest in Moscow, Fr Aleksii Vlasov. This group is not recognised by any other branch of the True Orthodox Church, but it seems to have links with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church. In January 1991, Archbishop Volodymyr (Sterniuk) accepted Vikenti into the Eastern-rite Catholic Church and then appointed him bishop of all the Eastern-rite Catholics in Russia. However, on 9 March the Vatican issued a statement by Cardinal Ivan Lubachiv'sky, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, saying that Archbishop Volodymyr had exceeded

<sup>16</sup> 'Otkrytoe pis'mo khristian katakombnoi tserkvi', *Khristianskiye novosti*, No. 8, 10 February 1991, pp. 12-14.

<sup>17</sup> *Khristianskiye novosti*, No. 8, 10 February 1991, pp. 9-12; No. 10, 24 February 1991, p. 22; No. 13, 17 March 1991, pp. 15-16; *Keston News Service*, No. 368 (7 February 1991) p. 4; No. 379 (11 July 1991), p. 6.

his authority in making the appointment and had acted 'outside the limits of his position and jurisdiction and without the consent of either the holy Father or myself'.<sup>18</sup>

7. Three bishops of the Free Russian Orthodox Church who are sometimes classified as True Orthodox.

The Free Russian Orthodox Church (FROC) is the name of that branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), or Russian Church Abroad (RCA), which operates inside Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union. The number of its parishes had multiplied rapidly since the first was founded in Suzdal' in June 1990. Now they are to be found as far afield as Moscow, Vladimir, Orenburg and Kaliningrad regions, St Petersburg, Perm', Kursk, Kainsk (Kuibyshev), Voronezh, Simferopol', Sevastopol', Kerch, Ekaterinburg, Vladikavkaz, and (in Siberia) Omsk, Tyumen', Marianovsk, Barnaul, Kalachinsk, Shablikino and Ussuruisk.<sup>19</sup>

At present the FROC has three hierarchs: Archbishop Lazar of Tambov and Moshansk (consecrated secretly by Bishop Varnava of Cannes (RCA) in 1982), Bishop Valentin of Suzdal' and Bishop Venyamin of Gornostayevskiy (both consecrated in 1991). All three bishops are subject to the Synod of the RCA, which is situated in New York and whose leader is Metropolitan Vitali. A number of societies have declared their affiliation with the FROC and the RCA, including the Society of the Tsar-Martyr Nicholas, the Society of St Andrei (one of a group of German Orthodox communities), and the Brotherhood of St Iov of Pochayev in Moscow.<sup>20</sup>

The present position of the Russian Church Abroad vis-à-vis the True Orthodox Church represents a considerable volte-face. Until about the mid-1970s the emigre church remained faithful to the True Orthodox, recognising no other church organisation within Russia. However, in 1976 the bishops issued a statement in which they entered into communion of prayer with the dissident priests of the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>21</sup> Thereafter the Church Abroad has almost ceased to mention the True Orthodox, devoting almost all its attention to the dissidents. The True Orthodox Church, knowing nothing about these developments, continued to look towards the Russian Church Abroad as to a bastion of Orthodoxy and her only support in the outside world. As late as Great Lent 1990 a group of Tikhonite bishops issued

<sup>18</sup> *Keston News Service*, No. 366 (10 January 1991), p. 14; No. 369 (21 February 1991), p. 15; No. 373 (18 April 1991), p. 15; *Khristianskiye novosti*, No. 12, (10 March 1991), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> News on the founding of FROC parishes is regularly reported in *Pravoslavnaya Rus'* (Jordanville, N.Y.), the official organ of the RCA.

<sup>20</sup> 'The Free Russian Orthodox Church', *Orthodoxy America* (Redding, CA), Vol. XI No. 6 (January-February 1991), pp. 6-10; *Pravoslavnaya Rus'*, 1991 No. 11, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> *The Orthodox Word*, Vol. 12 No. 5 (70) (September-October, 1976), p. 164.



a statement of faith recognising the authority of the Russian Church Abroad in doctrinal matters.<sup>22</sup> But then in August 1990 the Russian Church Abroad officially rejected the priesthood of a long list of catacomb clergy, and at present it appears that it accepts the priesthood only of Archimandrite (now Bishop) Guri of the 'passportless' — while at the same time not sharing the completely uncompromising attitude of the 'passportless' towards the Soviet state. This has caused distress and division among catacomb communities across the country. The present author witnessed an instance of this in September 1990 when a young Tikhonite priest in Moscow took off his cross, declared that he was not a priest and joined Bishop Lazar, who reordained him. His parish refused to follow him.

The FROC has been subject of bitter, often violent attacks from the Moscow Patriarchate, which has usually had the support of local authorities in resisting the creation of FROC parishes, in spite of the relatively liberal legislation on religious organisations passed by the Soviet and Russian parliaments last year. The methods used have ranged from outright seizure of FROC churches<sup>23</sup> to the refusal to register FROC parishes or hand over vacant churches to them,<sup>24</sup> and even to the creation of 'dummy' patriarchal parishes or parish committees to prevent an already registered FROC from obtaining a church.<sup>25</sup> The result is that many FROC priests still serve in flats, or in 'semi-catacomb' conditions. This 'catacombal' tendency has been reinforced by the fact that many members of the True Orthodox Church, who have lived in the catacombs of Soviet life for decades, have joined the FROC. The leader of the FROC, Archbishop Lazar, was himself a member of the True Orthodox Church for many years.

During the failed coup of August 1991, several members of the True Orthodox Church were to be found on the barricades in front of the Russian parliament building. A particularly prominent and laudable role was played by several priests of the FROC.

On the behaviour of the church during the coup, there is marked disagreement between patriarchal and FROC representatives. Patriarch Aleksii claimed that he had been against the plotters from the

<sup>22</sup> *Ispovedal'naya gramota very pravoslavnogo khristianina Katakombnoy Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi (Tikhonovskoy)* (MS).

<sup>23</sup> For incidents in Sevastopol', Sovetsk (Kaliningrad region) and Kainsk (Kuibyshev), see *Pravoslavnaya Rus'*, 1990 No. 24, p. 6; 1991 No. 11, p. 12; 1991 No. 14, p. 10; *Keston News Service*, No. 376 (30 May 1991), p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> For cases in Valishchevo (Moscow region), Tomsk and Slavsk (Kaliningrad region), see 'The Free Russian Orthodox Church', *Orthodoxy America*, *op. cit.*; *Pravoslavnaya Rus'*, 1991 No. 14, p. 11; *Khristianskiye novosti*, No. 18 (21 April 1991), p. 17; *Keston News Service*, No. 379 (11 July 1991), p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> For a case in Moscow, see *Khristianskiye novosti*, No. 1, (23 December 1990), pp. 10-13; *Pravoslavnaya Rus'*, 1991 No. 13, p. 12.

beginning and defended his hierarchs against charges that they had backed it.<sup>26</sup> However, according to priests of the Russian Church Abroad, who immediately set up a headquarters to support Yeltsin and the Russian government in a Moscow church, the Patriarch was approached by Aleksandr Rutskoï, the Russian vice-president, on the morning of Monday 19 August. The Patriarch at first refused to see Rutskoï, excusing himself on grounds of illness,<sup>27</sup> and his response, when it came (late on Tuesday), was, in Fr Gleb Yakunin's words, 'rather weak'.<sup>28</sup> However, other senior hierarchs made their position clear — in support of the coup.<sup>29</sup>

According to the FROC, it was not until Wednesday morning that the Patriarch sent his representative, Deacon Andrei Kurayev, to the Russian parliament building, by which time several Orthodox priests were already established there, including Frs Gleb Yakunin, Oleg Stenayev, Nikolai Artemov and others. And it was an RCA priest, Fr Nikolai Artemov, who celebrated the first supplicatory service to the New Martyrs of Russia on the balcony of the White House. The Patriarchate immediately responded with its own prayer service, and at some time during the same day the Patriarch anathematised all those who took part in organising the coup.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, it is the FROC which is likely to benefit from the failure of the coup, rather than the patriarchate.

The present position of the True Orthodox Church (excluding the FROC) is extremely difficult and precarious. It might have been expected that it would have benefited greatly from the changes of the Gorbachev years — especially *glasnost*, the weakening of persecution against religion and the strengthening of dissidence within the Moscow Patriarchate. Other sister churches in the communist block have benefited from the changes. Thus since the fall of Ceausescu in Romania in December 1989 the True Orthodox Church of Romania has come above ground and has started an extensive church-building

<sup>26</sup>Oxana Antic, 'Church Reaction to the Coup', *Report on the USSR*, Vol. 3 No. 38, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup>Hiermonk Tikhon Kazushin, personal communication.

<sup>28</sup>Nataliya Babisiyan, 'Svyashchenniki na barrikadakh', *Khristianskiye novosti*, No. 38 (22 August 1991), p. 21; Jane Ellis, 'The Russian Church: Hopes and Fears', *Church Times*, 13 September 1991.

<sup>29</sup>Thus Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev, in a sermon in church on the Monday (which was the Orthodox feast of the Transfiguration) welcomed the coup as heralding a return to normality (Hiermonk Tikhon Kazushin, personal communication). This also seems to have been the position of Metropolitan Pitirim of Volokolamsk, according to a report by Aleksandr Yefimov (*Khristianskiye novosti*, No. 39, 27 August 1991, p. 23.)

<sup>30</sup>*Report on the USSR*, Vol. 3 No. 35, 30 August 1991, p. 40; Vol. 3 No. 36, 6 September 1991, p. 82; Oxana Antic, 'Church Reaction to the Coup', *Report on the USSR*, *op. cit.*, p. 15; Margaret Duggan, "'Law" and "Liberty" to be watchword of Russian Church', *Church Times*, 30 August 1991, p. 1.

programme, and Metropolitan Silvestru has spoken on television.<sup>31</sup> Why have the True Orthodox of Russia so far failed to make a similar impact?

Several factors should be taken into account:

1. The disorganised and disunited state of the Catacomb Church at the beginning of the Gorbachev period, caused by decades of the most intense persecution and KGB infiltration. Only a Council of the Catacomb Church attended by representatives of all its branches would seem to be able to resolve these problems. But such a Council, which has been called for by the 'passportless', has so far proved impossible to convene, not least because many clergy and believers still live deep in the catacombs and their addresses are unknown. Thus Metropolitan Yepifani of the Tikhonites told the present author that he does not know the addresses of all the bishops of his church.

2. The doubtfulness, from a strictly canonical point of view, of the consecrations of the Tikhonite bishops. The consecrations of both the 'founding fathers' of this church, Bishop Serafim (Pozdeyev) and Metropolitan Gennadi (Sekach), were carried out in secret with no documentation. Again, it is probable that only a Council in which all living witnesses (including the KGB!) were carefully interrogated could decide these questions to everyone's satisfaction. Many people feel that Metropolitan Vitali of the Russian Church Abroad used to be in the best position to convene such a Council, act as an impartial judge acceptable to all, and correct the Tikhonites' orders if that was found to be necessary. But his fateful decision to open parishes in Russia independent of the True Orthodox Church, and still more his rejection of the sacraments of almost the whole of the True Orthodox Church, has removed that possibility.

3. The inability of the True Orthodox to acquire above-ground churches. All open churches functioning at present are in the hands of the Moscow Patriarchate apart from the two or three whose parishes passed over from the Patriarchate into the jurisdiction of the Russian Church Abroad. In October 1990, shortly after the passing of the new Law on Freedom of Conscience, Fr Aleksii Vlasov tried to acquire a church for his community, but without success. Until recently, the True Orthodox Church has not tried to acquire churches because this involved registration with the authorities and therefore recognition of Soviet power and KGB infiltration. It is argued that neither registration nor recognition of Soviet power is now required; but in practice it appears that the Economic Department of the patriarchate is successfully blocking the attempts of dissident Orthodox communities to acquire churches which are not already functioning as such.

<sup>31</sup> *La Foi Transmise et la Sainte Tradition* (Lavardac, France: 1990).

In the longer term, however, this inability to acquire above-ground churches may be a blessing in disguise. For if the political climate changes, persecution of the faith is resumed, and the patriarchal hierarchs again adopt a pro-Soviet position, the True Orthodox Church will be in a better position than any above-ground church to receive those believers who cannot accept the compromises of the Moscow Patriarchate. Its existing network of house-churches will simply have to be expanded to accommodate the new converts.

Whatever the current difficulties of the True Orthodox Church in its ideological struggle with the Moscow Patriarchate it has made very significant gains in the Gorbachev period. Dissatisfaction with the compromising and self-serving policies of the Patriarchate has become sharper and much more widespread. It is generally accepted among the believing intelligentsia that Metropolitan Sergi's declaration in 1927 — the original reason for the schism between the Patriarchate and the True Orthodox Church — was, to say the least, a great mistake. And if it is the Russian Church Abroad, rather than the True Orthodox Church, which has so far reaped the benefits of this consciousness, this may not last long. As soon as the True Orthodox Church has resolved the doubts about the canonicity of its hierarchy (perhaps through the mediation of the True Orthodox Church of Greece), we may expect a massive influx into the church which has upheld the banner of anti-soviet and anti-sergianist Orthodoxy through all the bitterness and martyrdom of more than sixty years of Soviet reality.