

The Case of the Kiev Apostolic Orthodox Church*

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On 24 October 1924, by personal decree, Patriarch Tikhon granted the Kiev Monastery of the Caves independent status (*stavropigia*), freeing it from supervision by the provincial ecclesiastical authorities and subordinating it directly to the Moscow Patriarchate. The scope of the decree embraced the convents of Feodosiya and the Resurrection (*Feodosiyevskoye podvor'ye, Voskresenskoye podvor'ye*), affiliated to the monastery and headed by the abbess in schema (*skhiigumen'ya*) Mikhaila (Yelizaveta Fedorovna Shchelkina). On 30 October, by decree of Bishop Makari, administering the diocese of Kiev, the Feodosiya and Resurrection houses were renamed the Kiev Stavropigial Convent (*Kiyevsky Stavropigial'ny Monastyr'*). This community would have an eventful history, ultimately succumbing to Soviet persecution of religion and figuring in one of the group cases brought by the security organ, the GPU. This article is based largely on the criminal case records (Case No. 14951/967) and most quotations are from testimony by witnesses during the investigation. The name *Stavropigial'ny Monastyr'* (independent monastery or convent) is used in the official files. However, by the time of the indictment the convent had, through force of circumstances, evolved far from its origins; its leader at that time insisted on calling his organisation the Apostolic Orthodox Church (*Apostol'skaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov'*), deriving authority from the Local Church Council (*Pomestny Sobor*) of 1917, an authority he denied to any rival (prosoviet) church. This title appropriately describes the organisation ultimately targeted by the GPU.

Not too much is known about the abbess Mikhaila. She was born in 1862 in a peasant family in Vyazha, a village in Novovasil'yevsk *uyezd* of Tula *oblast'*. Orphaned in infancy, she was raised until the age of 16 in the family of a priest, Petr Kedrov. At 17 she became a novice at the Antoleptov convent, some 8 km from Dvinsk. Having completed a course at the school of nursing and midwifery in Rovno, she took over management of the hospital attached to her convent. In 1889 she became a nun, taking the name Mariya. From 1900 to 1904 she served as a nurse with the Russian army stationed in China and worked in a military hospital during the Russo-Japanese war. In 1905, at the end of the war, she took up duties as head of the Antoleptov convent, but moved a year later to become abbess of the Feodosiya Stavropigial Convent attached to the Kiev Monastery of the Caves. In 1917 she adopted the rigid and austere monastic regime known as schema (*skhima*) and took

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the name Mikhaila. As a passionate monarchist she was from the first adamantly opposed to the Soviet regime, considered it a temporary aberration and constantly predicted its imminent demise and the restoration of tsarist rule.

In December 1924 the Soviet authorities closed the Monastery of the Caves and all its affiliated houses. The members of the Stavropigial Convent, numbering some 200 persons, did not disperse, however, but took up residence illegally in private houses on the outskirts of Kiev in the village of Borshagovka, continuing to hold divine service under the direction of Abbess Mikhaila and an archimandrite, Mikhail (Aleksandr Vasil'yevich Kostyuk). This latter, earlier in charge of the diocesan Cathedral of the Assumption in Smela, had been appointed archimandrite of the Stavropigial Convent by order of the patriarch three months before the regime closed it down; he and his colleague now headed a community which would continue to exist and work underground.

Following the death of Patriarch Tikhon and the publication (July 1927) of the Declaration by Metropolitan Sergi (Stragorodsky) which proclaimed the submission of the Russian Orthodox Church to Soviet rule, both the abbess and the archimandrite refused to recognise Sergi's authority as acting head of the church and claimed that by his actions the church 'had sold itself to the Soviet regime'. Their hostility intensified and their alienation from the national political scene was underlined by an impressive ceremony on 15 November 1929, the feast of the saints Guri, Samon and Aviva, protectors of the Romanov imperial line. On that day Abbess Mikhaila formally transferred to Archimandrite Mikhail her *starchestvo*, her status and authority as a holy elder, spiritual mentor of the monastic community at large. According to the archimandrite, Mikhaila had herself been invested with this status by the *starets* (elder) Aleksei in 1917, but on becoming abbess and assuming administrative responsibilities she had been obliged to pass the spiritual role of elder to a successor. As witnesses later recalled, the abbess, after a celebratory service, asked Mikhail to kneel before an icon of the Virgin, took up a small brush tipped with wadding, dipped it in the oil of the icon-lamp and traced the sign of the Cross on the archimandrite's forehead and shoulder. Then she clothed him in the robes that she herself had assumed on adopting the schema, declaring while she did so that she now entrusted to him her authority as elder. Archimandrite Mikhail offered a radical interpretation of this ceremony; he was convinced that 'his anointing by the abbess as tsar [was] a gift from God and that from that time onward he truly was the secret tsar of Russia'. He revered Abbess Mikhaila as an authentic holy elder, by virtue of which status all her actions 'were regarded by him as law, assuming that her instructions came directly from God'. The day of his anointing, 15 November, was thereafter commemorated annually in the Stavropigial community by a ceremony in which the archimandrite, clad in the white robes of a bishop (it is likely that he had been secretly consecrated), was presented with the orb and sceptre as symbols of tsarist power, and also with the imperial tricolour flag. In 1940, at a time of mass arrests among monarchists and rigorous searches of their homes, the secret police would discover these vestments and symbols of sovereignty bricked up in a storage space in one of the houses.

Such activities increased the danger the community was courting. In December 1929 the local police at Borshagovka received an informer's report alleging that since the appearance in the village of a group of nuns led by Abbess Mikhaila illegal prayer meetings had been organised and were attracting believers. The authorities reacted swiftly by arresting both Mikhaila and Mikhail together with another archimandrite, Vasili (Voichenko) from the Nikolayevsk monastery, and nine of the nuns.

Mikhaila and Mikhail were released from gaol three months later but were expelled from the village. They were sheltered secretly in Kiev by three nuns, the mother and daughters Lupandina, but the abbess was later obliged to move to the apartment of another nun, Pelageya Ivakhnenko. She now directed her charges to go out into the countryside to collect contributions and enlist new recruits for the clandestine convent. She herself administered vows to many of her devotees from villages in Sumy, Kirovograd, Kiev and other provinces.

By early 1930, realising that it was impossible to sustain a monastic community which adhered to tradition in rejecting the paid employment which was now officially mandatory, Archimandrite Mikhail proposed that the monks and nuns should officially become 'workers'. On Abbess Mikhaila's orders they began to register for work in various enterprises and state institutions, to enrol in trades unions and in general to create the impression of having abandoned a religious for a secular existence. At the same time the archimandrite called on a large group of monks (and a few nuns) from the villages of Rebedailovka and Srebrovka in Kirovograd *oblast'* to come to Kiev and take jobs in factories or on the railway and to join trades unions. All these recruits were to contribute ten per cent of their monthly wage to monastic funds as a 'charitable donation'. This income financed the purchase of private houses and other property to accommodate the gradually increasing numbers, men as well as women, attracted into the community; 13 such houses were acquired in Kiev alone. By the end of 1930 all members were officially employed. As a further refinement, Mikhail instructed monks and nuns to contract fictitious marriages and pose as normal 'households' legally entitled to purchase homes. Such fake marriages also allowed new arrivals in the community to be registered officially as residents and acquire residence permits, an increasingly important consideration after 1937 when such permits became very difficult to obtain in Kiev. Elderly monks and nuns, unable to work, were registered as relatives living with and supported by the 'household'; their duty was to educate the younger generation by passing on their experience of monastic life. Since this clandestine and diffuse community contained far more women than men, the more reliable monks were issued with false passports to contract spurious marriages with two or three different nuns, each 'family' then acquiring a home.

The community had many smaller scattered offshoots, mostly in Kirovograd,¹ Kiev,² Sumy,³ Rovno,⁴ Poltava and Chernigov *oblasti*. The most significant of these affiliates was however in Stalino *oblast'*, in Zaitsevo (Gorlovka *raion*), a community dating from 1914 and numbering more than 100, many of whom had taken their vows at the Kiev Monastery of the Caves. Its organiser and administrator was the abbess in schema Serafima but the community had been accepted as a branch of the Stavropigial Convent in 1919 and now recognised Abbess Mikhaila as its spiritual superior. Monastic life in Zaitsevo was modelled on that in the parent body. Serafima's deputy, Sister Anastasiya, regularly travelled to Kiev to seek counsel and blessing from Mikhaila and to resolve with her aid the complex problems created by the volatile political situation. It was through her that the Zaitsevo convent annually paid over part of its income to the parent house; the latter was also supported by the convent of Vasilisa and Ioann of Zlatoust, some 60 km from Sukhumi, where over 200 nuns were led by another of Abbess Mikhaila's spiritual daughters, again Serafima. Here there were three churches, the chief of which was in the care of an archimandrite, Dimitri, assisted by two priests and two deacons. This convent was subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate until 1930, but then passed under the jurisdiction of the newly autonomous Caucasus church province headed by Archbishop

Antoni. During 1936 and 1937 Abbess Serafima several times travelled to Kiev conveying money and gifts to Abbess Mikhaila.

The Kiev community wished to solicit alms and also to make believers aware of its existence and activities. To this end Archimandrite Mikhail despatched monks and nuns to villages and towns in Sumy, Kirovograd, Chernigov and other *oblasti*. They carried with them the Host, holy water and icons depicting Abbess Mikhaila as 'a saint, a miracle worker, wise, pure in heart and all-seeing'. They also had photographs of the archimandrite which they distributed to the faithful as 'the blessing of Father [*Batyushka*] Mikhail'. The most zealous of these proselytisers were the nuns Varvara Bilenko, Tat'yana Ishchenko, Anna Karpenko, Mariya Prokopenko, Varvara Pustovaya and Anna Sereda. Supervision of recruits to the monastic life in Kirovograd, Poltava, Chernigov and elsewhere was exercised by Archimandrite Mikhail in person, either during their visits to Kiev or during his own excursions to the various outlying centres.

In 1930–31 Abbess Mikhaila, believing that 'collectivisation [of agriculture] is entirely the work of Antichrist', ordered nuns under her jurisdiction to launch a propaganda campaign to persuade the peasants not to enter collective farms and to convince them that the collectives were 'the coming of Antichrist into the world' which heralded their 'complete enslavement'. In 1933–34 they also campaigned for rejection of the recently adopted passport regime, telling the faithful that the Soviet passport was 'the seal of Antichrist'. Most nuns refused to accept passports and many, including nuns in schema Aleksandra, Mikhaila and Serafima, defied the law by continuing to live with neither passports nor residence permits. Mikhaila herself was committed to rejection of all things Soviet, but since her leadership position demanded at least some precautions, she was given the passport of a parishioner which she could present if stopped on the street.

Abbess Mikhaila died on 24 June 1939, at a house in Kiev (10 Novo-Vladimirskaya Street). Her body was exposed in the courtyard for believers to make their solemn farewells. When parishioners began to question the long delay before her interment, Sister Yelizaveta (Anastasiya Lupandina), Mikhaila's closest associate and organiser of the funeral arrangements, informed them that the deceased was 'the mother of [Stalin's henchman] Molotov, that the latter had been informed by telegram and that the burial would await his expected arrival in Kiev'. On Archimandrite Mikhail's instructions a document, inscribed in gilded letters, was prepared purporting to convey the official permission of the Moscow government for the funeral ceremony. It was an odd twist that the abbess was buried under the name of the woman whose passport she had used since 1934; the supposed Moscow authorisation stated: 'I sanction the interment of Romancha, Yelizaveta Fedorovna, in accordance with the traditional Christian rite', that is, in accordance with the Orthodox rite endorsed by Patriarch Tikhon. This impressive document, wrapped in a napkin, was borne like an icon by Anastasiya Lupandina at the head of the funeral procession. The burial service was accompanied by a choir but no priests participated because Mikhaila had refused to recognise clergy attached either to the pro-soviet Renovatist or Living Church or to the officially tolerated Patriarchate administered by Metropolitan Sergi (Stragorodsky).

Witnesses and accused in subsequent criminal proceedings would testify that the funeral drew a large crowd and 'a procession around the town by both monastic and lay believers, with an active attempt to attract the young, especially children of school age, demonstrating the authority and devotion which the abbess commanded'. The archimandrite ordered 200 portrait photographs of the abbess with what the GPU

described as 'inscriptions of a religious character' and these were distributed during the procession. Following the interment, throughout the month of July masses and requiems were held daily in apartments and at the Baikov cemetery. The latter became a centre of pilgrimage where the faithful, including monks and nuns and many poor, were presented with images of Mikhaila and gifts of food and money. During the funeral and after it rumours circulated to the effect that the local authorities had reacted to the funeral procession with sympathetic restraint because Mikhaila had earlier 'donated more than 40,000 roubles to the state for national defence and for the establishment of day nurseries and had given five pounds of gold to the police'.

The official attitude, however, as recorded in the case file, was that the funeral 'assumed the character of an antisoviet demonstration', while to the security organs 'it served to expose the activities of a clerical-monastic grouping'. During the night of 14–15 August, in the home of a monk, Nikolai Siliyan, there took place one of a series of services of prayer for the deceased abbess, attended by 29 people from the Kiev monastic community together with members from monasteries and convents elsewhere in Ukraine. Suddenly secret police burst into the apartment and arrested all those present. Over the next few days monastic and lay communities in Kiev saw many detained, particularly their most active members.⁵ All were charged with 'organising mass gatherings in apartments and at the Baikov cemetery and conducting antisoviet agitation'. During the subsequent investigation many nuns flatly refused to testify, stating (in the single record of their interrogation that the file contains) 'I know of Abbess in schema Mikhaila and other persons, but I do not wish to speak to you and I will say nothing in court.' They all proclaimed their innocence and refused to sign documents listing the charges. Many denied that their marriages were bogus, hoping in this way to prevent the confiscation of houses which had been bought ostensibly as 'family homes'.

The first four accused, detained on 15–17 August 1939, were presented on 20 August with the formal indictment depicting their activities in terms of the GPU's favourite model of a malevolent, hierarchically organised conspiratorial structure. The four nuns were indicted as 'leaders of cells of a clerical-monastic grouping who had headed the funeral procession and subsequently organised mass meetings under the guise of prayers for the deceased Abbess Mikhaila'. The four denied any guilt and refused to sign. Their confinement pending sentence was extended until 20 December because the local police were instructed to 'examine the judicial basis of the acquisition of houses and determine by investigation to whom they belonged in reality'. They should 'institute civil proceedings against the former owners of such buildings, having examined, with the aid of expert opinion, the prospect of bringing suit for eviction, after having discovered the true owners'.

Archimandrite Mikhail was himself apprehended on the day of the funeral, but not having his documents with him he was able to conceal his real identity; he claimed simply to be a former monk and was released the same day. He would later admit that in order to keep possession of the private houses purchased by the community, the deeds certifying ownership were hurriedly revised to transfer title from nuns arrested to those still at liberty. Officials at the public notary office had been bribed to accept copies of these documents as 'deeds of purchase'. In September 1939 the archimandrite, fearing arrest, left Kiev for the Donbass to take refuge in one of Kiev's associated monastic houses. He lived there illegally for over four months and returned to Kiev only in early 1940 to assume the leadership of the clandestine mixed community which had developed around the Stavropigial Convent.

From 4 October 1939 investigation into 'the case of the Stavropigial Convent' was

pursued with vigour. November and December saw new arrests, both in Kiev and in convent affiliates throughout the Ukraine. Searches at the homes of nuns found many old church books, icons and golden ritual objects, while the GPU also seized letters from Abbess Mikhaila to other convents. Among abundant 'material evidence' fuelling the case were portraits of the abbess with the inscription 'Peace be upon this house: By the Grace of God, Abbess in schema Mikhaila, the Venerable, the Chosen, the Great. Come to me all ye who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest.' There were also monarchist symbols – a portrait of Nicholas II, a church calendar for 1916 with a cover depicting the heir to the throne, the Tsarevich Aleksei Romanov, and a magazine with a photograph of the imperial family. Papers in the GPU case file indicate that 58 old books and a great many icons were destroyed 'as having no bearing on the case, possessing no intrinsic value and being not for return [to the owners]'. Gold objects, cash and other valuables seized during searches were confiscated and declared Soviet state property. The same fate befell the five private houses belonging to the convent.

The official indictment of ten activists, issued on 31 December 1939, stated that investigators had established the existence

over several years, of a substantial antisoviet clerical–monarchist organisation with many branches, in the form of a clandestine convent/monastery of the True Orthodox Church, created and led by the abbess in schema Mikhaila, the members of which were indoctrinated with monarchist ideas and, on her orders, conducted antisoviet activity, entered into bogus marriages for antisoviet purposes, persuaded young people to take monastic vows and established cells [of the organisation] in several *raiony* of Kiev, Kirovograd, Poltava and other *oblasti*.

It appears that during interrogation one of the accused named Archimandrite Mikhail as head of the illegal community and a nationwide search was instituted both for him and for those nuns who had managed to go into hiding and avoid arrest. Their cases were set aside for separate continued investigation. The group case against those in custody was tried in the Kiev provincial court on 27–28 January 1940. The Lupandina sisters would neither admit their guilt nor give any kind of evidence concerning the activities of their late abbess, affirming that 'since the Soviet government does not recognise God, we do not recognise the Soviet government'. The nun Yefrosin'ya Klyushnik, in her last words to the court, declared that she 'had never submitted to Soviet rule and would not submit to it now'. The judges sentenced eight of the defendants under two articles of the Ukrainian Republic criminal code, Article 54-10 (antisoviet agitation) and 54-11 (doing it as part of an organisation) which mirrored the notorious Article 58 of the Russian Republic penal code. On 17 February the Ukrainian Supreme Court confirmed sentences of ten years in corrective labour camp and three years' subsequent deprivation of civil rights, with confiscation of all property.

Between 20 and 27 March 1940 the GPU finally captured three nuns and a monk hunted in a nationwide operation. Searches at a nun's home revealed gold and silver vessels belonging to the convent and two placards with the monarchist slogan 'God save the tsar' ('*Bozhe tsarya khrani*'), the first line of the old national anthem. After four months of interrogation and confrontations with witnesses, the four were indicted as 'members of an illegal organisation' and on 27 July 1940 they were sentenced, also under Articles 54-10 and 54-11, to between three and six years in the camps and two or three years' loss of civil rights.

In early June 1940 Archimandrite Mikhail composed a set of prayers glorifying the dead Mikhaila as 'Autocrat of all the Russias and the anointed of God'. He praised the Romanov dynasty and promised the restoration of tsarist rule. In May 1941 an artist, Pavel Savitsky, arrived in Kiev and shortly afterwards was secretly inducted as a monk in the illegal community. He transcribed this series of prayers on fine paper with professional artistry, the pages with tricolour borders in the tsarist colours and corners decorated with imperial crowns. Also on the archimandrite's instructions, Savitsky painted an icon of the *Arkhi stratig*, the Archangel Michael in his role as commander of the heavenly host, mounted on a horse and slaying a serpent, but in place of the serpent the artist painted 'as a symbol of Godlessness, a likeness of one of the leaders of the Party and the Soviet State'. The likeness was actually of Stalin but the investigators prudently omitted the name from the file.

When German troops occupied Kiev in September 1941 monastic activity was legalised and the convent was registered under its original name with the office of Culture and Propaganda of the German city administration, the Stadtkommissariat. There were still difficulties: in summer 1942 the archimandrite had to send two nuns, Yelizaveta Artemenko and Ol'ga Kosach, to the local Gestapo with a formal declaration that the Abbess Mikhaila had not been Molotov's mother and indeed had had no connection at all with the Soviet leadership. This was prompted by information that the German authorities were of a mind to destroy her grave.

In February 1942 Archimandrite Mikhail drafted a petition to the head of Kiev diocese, Bishop Pantaleimon (Rudyk), requesting official sanction for a 'home-based' church of the Stavropigial community in a house it owned at No. 17-6 Sadovaya Street. Public services had been held there since the arrival of the Germans, but without diocesan licence. The petition was submitted to the bishop in April and the latter, having perused it, wrote 'This has my blessing' and added his signature and the date. The archimandrite entrusted the officially endorsed document to Pavel Savitsky with the request that he make a suitably impressive copy. The paper was then passed to the occupation authorities at the Stadtkommissariat and in June they issued a permit for the opening of the church of All Saints in the Sadovaya Street property. The daily services which Mikhail held there were attended not only by his own monks and nuns but by increasing numbers of local people. A copy of the icon of the Archangel Michael was installed in the church and at every service the archimandrite recited prayers dedicated to Abbess Mikhaila. GPU investigators later included extracts in the case file; the suggestion of approval of the defeat of Soviet forces was particularly damaging.

Thou hast turned to nothing the Devil and all the foul and impious counsel which flows from his never-ending slanders Having come to love one another in our unity of purpose ... and in our common endeavour we beg of God all that is good and useful to our emperor, with victory in all things for thy sake, Mikhaila, protectress of the imperial house, who prays for their destiny. Revealing by irrefutable reason the essence of the true life, all-beloved Mikhaila, toiling with tears for the sake of our daily bread, keeping thyself pure, thou hast presented thyself before the throne of Christ as a mighty pillar of piety and love. By thy meekness thou hast driven the monster of blind Godlessness from the face of the earth. Exalting thy courage we praise thee ever Rejoice, triumphant consolation, rejoice in having extinguished the foulest light over our motherland, rejoice in turning to dust the Evil One and all his agents.

Under the Germans there were two Orthodox church organisations in Kiev, the 'autonomous' and the 'autocephalous', led respectively by Bishop Pantaleimon and Archbishop Nikanor. Archimandrite Mikhail, as head of the Stavropigial community, disagreed with both prelates on canonical matters and recognised neither as his superior. His flock had by then outgrown the original convent to become a broad and diffuse community of monks, nuns and laypeople, although GPU case documents would consistently refer to it as the 'Kiev Stavropigial Convent'. While the archimandrite rejected the bishops, he received and welcomed as participants in divine service any priests who visited the community and acknowledged him as a holy elder (*starets*). Although he had utilised Pantaleimon's authority to obtain a licence for Sadovaya Street, his relations with the bishop were particularly strained. Pantaleimon constantly ordered inspections at the convent and sent a stream of denunciations to the German authorities, even alleging that the archimandrite had no claim to priestly status. This led to demands for documentary evidence of Mikhail's career as a clergyman, without which his monastic community and his church of All Saints would be denied official registration. The archimandrite now faced a real problem since, as he later testified, all such evidence had vanished during the course of his numerous arrests and periods of detention. He now put Pavel Savitsky to work forging the necessary papers and the artist produced a remarkably comprehensive collection, including:

- Extracts from parish registers certifying the archimandrite's birth and baptism.
- Diplomas and graduation certificates from the Kiev military nursing school, the Khabarovsk military cadet school, Kiev University faculty of medicine and the Theological Academy.
- A document appointing A.V. Kostyuk pastor of the Church of the Assumption in the town of Smela, signed by Nikolai, bishop of Cherkassy and Chigirin.
- An award to A.V. Kostyuk of a 'missionary cross' in recognition of exemplary zeal in propagating the faith among the population. This also was signed by Bishop Nikolai.
- The decree of Patriarch Tikhon appointing A.V. Kostyuk archimandrite in the Kiev Monastery of the Caves.
- Confirmation of the patriarchal decree, signed by Afanasi, bishop of Skvira and Belaya Tserkov'.
- A further award of a missionary cross to A.V. Kostyuk, signed by Bishop Afanasi.

The archimandrite would later admit under interrogation that the documents the GPU discovered in various hiding places had all been manufactured on his instructions by Savitsky. He claimed that the original patriarchal letter appointing him archimandrite had been entrusted to Bishop Afanasi in 1925, while all other papers had simply been lost. He insisted that authentic documents had existed and that he had ordered copies made in good faith, anticipating that the occupation authorities might demand such evidence before they would register the monastic community and permit the Sadovaya Street church to function.

In 1942 the community's holy day of 15 November was celebrated with particular pomp and fervour. After the normal service in the church Archimandrite Mikhail received gifts of bread, pies and apples. The choir sang a hymn of greeting, 'Many years ...'. A monk, Porfiri Romancha, conveying to Mikhail the felicitations of the community on the anniversary of his anointing, offered him, as tsar, the imperial tricolour flag.

As news of the officially-sanctioned opening of the church of All Saints spread both in Kiev and in the province, believers flocked to the church. The congregation swelled dramatically and services became severely overcrowded. Since the new arrivals brought gifts of food⁶ and money, Archimandrite Mikhail began to think of building a second church. However, while Bishop Pantaleimon had consented to the original church opening, his relations with Mikhail had deteriorated and he refused to sanction any new project. The archimandrite nevertheless decided to go ahead. The difficulties involved in acting without episcopal approval were resolved by mobilising Savitsky's talents yet again. Instructed by Mikhail, the artist prepared what purported to be a petition to Pantaleimon from monks, nuns and laypeople in the settlements of Aleksandrovskaya Sloboda, Chekalovka and Pervomaiskoye requesting permission to build a church because the previous one had been destroyed by the Soviet security organs, the NKVD. Savitsky then forged the assent of the bishop, 'This has my blessing', copying the signature from the original protocol approving the church of All Saints. A village elder, in his capacity as churchwarden, forwarded this document to the Stadtkommissariat. The head of its Culture and Propaganda department asked various questions – who would be pastor, how far were the settlements from the nearest existing church, how many people, young, old, did the monastic community contain, how would the project be financed? Every question was answered in detail and within a few days the occupation authorities issued official permits. Design and construction were handled by Aleksandr Verbitsky, an engineer, and work began on 18 January 1943, financed by contributions from the faithful. Monks and nuns were assiduous in missionary activity and in raising funds, while the able-bodied, both monastic and lay, worked physically on the site. Carts provided by believers brought timber from forests around Kiev; even German motor transport was sometimes available. Officials of the Stadtkommissariat frequently visited the site to inspect progress and warned Mikhail that if he in any way breached the conditions imposed by the occupation administration the community would be closed and he himself called to account.

Armed with the fabricated documents complete with forged episcopal endorsement the archimandrite applied for permission to open yet another church on the site of the demolished Goloseyev Monastery in the forest of that name. This time the German authorities refused. Pavel Savitsky now copied Pantaleimon's signature onto another document supposedly recording the admission to holy orders of two monks of the Stavropigial community.

Mikhail also arranged that after service in Sadovaya Street a meal would be provided for parishioners. Not surprisingly, attendances increased, despite the continued overcrowding. Academics, engineers and other members of the intelligentsia were drawn to the church by talk of the archimandrite's powers as a 'healer and holy elder'.

There were many who resented Archimandrite Mikhail's activities, and denunciations led the local Gestapo to conduct searches on three separate occasions in connection with 'information reaching the Germans that the monastic community was harbouring Soviet partisans'. Mikhail declared that should partisans appear, he 'would consider it his duty to inform the police'. This would subsequently form the basis of a lethal charge of collaboration with the Nazis. He later explained at interrogation that he had made the statement 'as a matter of expediency and that he had never had any intention of turning partisans over to the enemy and had indeed taken no steps to do so'. His protestations had no effect on his interrogators nor on his ultimate fate.

During the building of the new church the archimandrite ordered the inclusion of two cellars with secret hiding-places, two in the first cellar and one in the second. This was accomplished as follows. After the cellar had been completed, the monks themselves built a second wall parallel to the original wall adjoining the staircase that gave access. This second wall extended upwards sufficiently to conceal the existence of the compartment behind it. Additionally, in the first cellar the space between the walls was divided in two by a transverse partition. The secret compartment in the second cellar was reached by an entrance from the sanctuary of the church. These hiding-places were used to store church plate, vestments and books, the church chandelier, icons, Mikhail's mitre and crosses, various documents, files containing, *inter alia*, cuttings from old magazines with photographs of Tsar Alexander II and his family, forged letters and certificates validating the status of the archimandrite and others, the prayer and canon dedicated to the abbess Mikhaila and sermons and verses of Mikhail's own composition.

Kiev was recaptured by the Red Army on 6 November 1943. The archimandrite now tried to register his community with the restored City Soviet. He submitted a falsified list of over 100 priests, monks and nuns. In his efforts to sway the new authorities he listed rank-and-file monks as ordained clergymen while for monks and nuns in general he exaggerated their periods of monastic service. It was important to portray the community as predominantly elderly. There were rumours that young men and even women would now be conscripted into the Red Army, and for this reason Mikhail added years to the ages of his younger disciples.

The arrest of both monastic and lay members of the once more illegal community began in December 1943.⁷ Archimandrite Mikhail was himself apprehended. The charge was a standard one and applied to all as 'participants in a clerical-monarchist organisation conducting antisoviet agitation among the population'. On 29 July 1943, by a resolution of a tribunal of the NKVD USSR in special session, most of the defendants were sentenced to between five and ten years in labour camp under Articles 58-10 and 58-11 of the penal code of the Russian Republic. Technically they should have been subject to the Ukrainian Republic code, Article 54 (see earlier), but the Soviet legal system had little time for such niceties.

The case against Mikhail and the artist-monk Savitsky, however, was set apart for further investigation in view of 'their established links with the German intelligence services'. The warrant for the arrest of Archimandrite Mikhail as head of the 'illegal Kiev Stavropigial Convent' stated that he had

organised an antisoviet monastic group based in the convent, regularly conducted prayers for Tsar Nicholas II and his family, kept in the convent pictures of the imperial family and a tsarist tricolour flag, used his group to carry out antisoviet defeatist activities among the population, predicting the destruction of Soviet rule and the restoration of a tsarist monarchy on the territory of the USSR, and created in his community a haven for persons evading punishment for their antisoviet activity during the German occupation or avoiding conscription into the Red Army.

The case documents offer us a lengthy, indeed exhaustive exposition of the archimandrite's beliefs and attitudes. Under interrogation he declared that he 'belonged to the Ancient Orthodox Catholic Church' resting on the authority of the last full Church Council (*Pomestny Sobor*). He had accepted the authority of Patriarch Tikhon until the latter's death in 1925 but after that time he had 'ceased to recognise the authority of any church centre or bishopric' because in his view there had been

since 1925 'no legitimately established patriarch but merely a patriarchal inter-regnum'. Divine service in the church he led was held in the presence of several priests and two of three deacons and was conducted communally (*soborno*), that is, all – priests, monks, nuns and laypeople – prayed together and shared the service in accordance with monastic rules. Regarding himself as the direct successor and spiritual son of the late abess in schema Mikhaila he had acted 'exclusively to preserve his essential 'I' [his personal integrity] in spiritual purity and in conformity with the precepts of the church'. At canonically prescribed points in the service he was therefore obliged to offer prayers for the Emperor Nicholas II and his crown and he had done this consciously, following the rules laid down by Ioann of Zlatoust which required that all Orthodox Christians pray for the tsars regardless of whether these be living or dead. Prayers for the tsar and the keeping of his portrait and the imperial flag, which various people brought to the convent, was for Mikhail a welcome duty because he saw the red–blue–white tricolour as an emblem of Russia and as the true national flag.

The interrogator taxed him with the assertion that the Christian outlook on life and Orthodox Church teachings maintained that 'there is no power that is not God-ordained' and that 'every person must pray for the established authorities'. Mikhail objected, insisting that he could in no way accept a Soviet regime which denied God. For him legitimate power in Russia could reside only in an authority which 'did not hound or constrain, but rather would create favourable conditions for religious life'. This was why he rejected Soviet rule. He detested a government whose security organs under their successive titles – GPU, NKVD, NKGB – had arrested him four times and held him for a long period in prison. For 25 years an oppressive Soviet regime had forced him to live outside the law, with neither passport nor residence permit, sheltering illegally in the homes of parishioners. He regarded it as inevitable that the current Soviet system would at some time in the future be replaced by a tsarist monarchy.

Questioned on his attitude to the contemporary Russian Orthodox church hierarchy led by Metropolitan Sergi (Stragorodsky) and tolerated by the Bolsheviks, the archimandrite declared that he saw it as 'uncanonical, in that it had departed from the bosom of the Apostolic Church as defined by a proper Church Council [*Pomestny Sobor*], and had, without Council sanction, abolished the customary prayers for the House of Romanov'. To him all clergy legally operating had sold themselves to the regime and all functioning churches in Russia and Ukraine were in effect GPU satellites. Metropolitan Sergi's recent (1943) election to the patriarchal throne was for Mikhail the installation of a Bolshevik protégé slavishly following the orders of the secret police; the archimandrite could not accept him as a 'patriarch'.

His estimation of his own conduct was simple. In his spiritual life he 'rigorously observed the canons of the '*Soborny* [as validated by Council] Apostolic Orthodox Church', and hence had the right to be acknowledged as the only true *locum tenens* on the patriarchal throne'. And since Abbess Mikhaila had anointed him tsar in 1929, many priests, monks and nuns, recognising the validity of his claim, had begun to exalt him not only as 'tsar' but also as 'patriarch of all Russia' and even as 'universal patriarch', the title reserved for the senior Patriarchate in Constantinople. It was as 'patriarch of all Russia' that he was acclaimed in sermons and honoured with special choral tributes.

Among other aspects of the Soviet order which Mikhail refused to digest was the division of the old empire into national 'union republics' and 'autonomous republics'. Russia must remain one and indivisible. He would not speak of Ukraine,

insisting on the term 'Little Russia' (*Malorossiia*) in the tradition of russification under the tsars. Indeed he proclaimed his ignorance of the Ukrainian language and his determination never to learn it. He accepted written Russian only when it adhered to prerevolutionary orthography and himself favoured the hard sign at the end of words, archaic vocabulary and old letters eliminated in the Soviet language reform. Similarly he refused to follow the western calendar which the Soviet regime had adopted.

Following the Nazi occupation of Kiev Mikhail had prophesied, both to his monastic disciples and to others who came to see him, that seven years after the German invasion the monarchy would return. In support of this prediction he recounted how he had been visited in September 1941 by Mikhei, a wandering holy man, who had told him that the Germans would not remain long in Russia but that Soviet rule would not be restored and a tsar would reign again. When the archimandrite asked him who would accomplish the return of the monarchy, the holy man answered that Moscow would itself bring it about.

The case file includes statements from so-called witnesses alleging that in reality 'the abbess in schema Mikhaila had not died in 1939 and her supposed burial had been staged by her followers in order that she might hide from the Soviet security organs and so that future "miracles" might be arranged'. In view of this testimony GPU documents in the file stress the necessity firstly 'of summoning Anastasiya Lupandina, currently imprisoned in Svobodlag camp [in Vladivostok *oblast'*], as a witness to the death and burial of the abbess in schema Mikhaila' and secondly of 'opening up the tomb for a forensic examination of the body to determine whether it is that of a female'. Lupandina was brought to Kiev and provided all the required details concerning the doctors who had signed the death certificate and the officials who had issued the permits for the interment. It was in the end unnecessary to open the vault for exhumation, because the death certificate from the polyclinic proved authentic and the many statements from witnesses who had seen the body at the funeral left no room for doubt.

Many witnesses testified under interrogation that when, in the summer of 1943, there was news of the approach of Soviet forces, Archimandrite Mikhail had assured his parishioners that it was not the Bolshevik Red Army but a transformed Russian National Army, in which all the tsarist traditions had been revived and the previous military ranks reinstated, with the old insignia and medals like the orders of Suvorov, Kutuzov and St Alexander Nevsky.

The final official indictment included, besides the charges enumerated above, a particularly grave accusation concerning Mikhail's 'close links with representatives of the punitive organs of the German administration, who gave him the task of unmasking Soviet partisans'. The archimandrite acknowledged guilt in only one matter, in that 'throughout the whole period of its existence the Kiev Stavropigial Convent which he headed conducted monarchist activity directed against Soviet rule'. As for providing the Soviet authorities with false information about the community's membership, he justified this as necessary to protect his people. Pavel Savitsky, indicted with him, confessed and signed the documents charging him with producing 'antisoviet icons' and falsifying passports, official permits and other documents for the benefit of other members of the illegal organisation. Investigating officers asked the prosecutor to transmit the case of Mikhail and Savitsky to a special NKVD tribunal, requesting a death sentence for the archimandrite and a ten-year camp term for the artist.

On 25 November 1944 a special tribunal of the NKVD USSR did indeed impose

the death penalty with confiscation of property. Mikhail was executed on 21 December 1944. In March 1957, during the Khrushchev-inspired period of case review and 'rehabilitation' of Stalin's victims, the archimandrite's sister, Yefrosin'ya Vasil'yevna Savitskaya (no relation to the artist) made inquiries about his fate. She was, of course unaware of the degree to which the rehabilitation process was corrupted. Throughout the Stalinist terror many executions had been masked by a fictional sentence of 'ten years without right of correspondence'. When reviews occurred in the 1950s the regime ordered that this ridiculous pretence be maintained; victims had not been killed, but had duly gone to the camps and died there of sickness at some later date. Mikhail's sister therefore received the contemptuous misinformation dispensed by the Soviet authorities to relatives of its victims; the day and month of death were correct but the year was falsified. She learned that Aleksandr Vasil'yevich Kostyuk had been sentenced to ten years in corrective labour camp and that 'while still in prison he died of uraemia of the kidneys on 21 December 1945'. On 28 July 1989, in the revolutionary atmosphere of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and genuine reevaluation of the past, Archimandrite Mikhail was at last declared innocent.

The last prosecutions of members of the illegal Kiev community occurred in 1948–49, but mostly involved reexamination of monks and nuns who, arrested back in 1939, had been released after serving their time in the camps. They now faced new charges of being active

participants in an illegal antisoviet organisation, the True Orthodox Church, while, as members of the antisoviet underground, they carried out antisoviet agitation among the population, propagated the monarchist ideas of the True Orthodox Church and gathered financial resources to meet the needs of an illegal monastic community.

They were all condemned to exile in Siberia or the Arctic for an indefinite period.

Notes

- ¹ In the villages of Rebedailovka, Berezhnyaki, Veronka, Plyakovka, Kitaigorod, Mikhailovka, Kamenka, Aleksandrovka, Fedvar and Zeleny Gai.
- ² In the towns of Smela, Cherkassy, Chigirin, Verguny and Khudoleyevka, and the villages of Volki, Novyye Petrovtsy, Staryye Petrovtsy, Gorenka, Makarovo, Boyarki, Budayevka, Borshagovka, Zhulyany and Sovki.
- ³ For example in the village of Yaroshevka.
- ⁴ For example in the village of Gritsevka.
- ⁵ Ye.P. Gvozdk, V.P. Ishchenko, E.P. Klyushnik, N.K. Klyushnik, A.G. Lupandina, K.G. Lupandina, M.P. Lupandina, U. Osadcha, N.I. Pluzhnik, S.I. Pluzhnik, P.I. Ratushny, N.L. Siliyan, Ye.S. Shamrai, M.T. Shamrai.
- ⁶ By early 1943 the community possessed a cow and a heifer, 25 chickens, five ducks and large stores of potatoes, cabbages and other vegetables.
- ⁷ Among the monks and nuns were Ye.F. Artemenko, M.A. Brigada, M. Garkavenko, T. Garkavenko, V.A. Zhila, P.G. Ivakhnenko, O.P. Kosach, M. Kashenko, Ye.I. Mironenko, U.A. Romancha, A.I. Salyga and the artist P.P. Savitsky.

(Translated from the Russian by Malcolm Gilbert)