

Metropolitan Sergii of Vilnius, Exarch of Latvia and Estonia, Unpublished Report (to the Germans) on the Church under the Soviet Regime

From the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet authorities declared a struggle against all types of religious convictions, based upon the principle that religion is the opium of the people, as is, in general, any idealistic *Weltanschauung*.

The main blow was directed against Orthodoxy. Although the Decree even spoke of the freedom of the performance of the 'religious cult', the authorities pursued the church activists with the utmost cruelty, covering up their persecutions of the Church and believers by the struggle with counter-revolution and its political opposition. Of course, no one doubted the simple truth, that every member of the Church, and most of all her servants, were persecuted before all else for their faith and adherence to Orthodoxy.

Such a condition existed already in 1923, that the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon, was forced to acknowledge- as was the entire Church- his guilt before the Bolsheviks for 'anti-Soviet' activity. Having made public his confession through the press, the Patriarch expressed regret over the former position of the Church, and with his return from house-arrest he promised to change his political course, refusing not only active, but even passive interference with the Soviet government.

What conditions called forth such a step by the Head of the Orthodox Church with its flock of many millions?

The Bolsheviks, having seized power by means of ruthless violence, and by shedding a sea of blood of the Russian people, above all encountered the Church's censure. Only the Church openly dared to declare the truth to them to their face. The ruling circles and the intelligentsia either perished honourably in the struggle with the usurpers, or were forced to flee abroad. The voice of the Church remained solitary because the Russian people, worn out by terror, could offer no real support. Hope remained alive for the first five to ten years for assistance from the European states; but even this receded further and further with each passing year, remaining only a distant and perhaps insubstantial dream for the Russian people. Thus, on one side there remained a small group of cruel usurpers - atheists - who were never troubled by their methods of terror, and on the other 130 000 000 believing Russian people. Meanwhile, life took its course, but each side understood the necessity of some legal form, defining the position of the Church. This position was especially strengthened after the recognition of the Soviet Government by the European states. The Bolsheviks had to demonstrate their 'tolerant' relationship to Church life.

If, in 1923, Patriarch Tikhon found it necessary to make a sacrifice of personal humiliation for the sake of the Church, then at the moment of the accession to the direction of the Church by Metropolitan Sergii of Nizhni-Novgorod, one of the locum-tenens of the Patriarch, there arose with full clarity the necessity of the stabilization of the Church administration. It is necessary not

to forget that the Bolsheviks, for reasons outlined above, had already taken their own peculiar steps at 'legalising' the Church. Through the agents of the Cheka they found a group of bishops and priests who announced the deposition of the Patriarch, named themselves the 'Living Church' or 'Renovationists', and who were already prepared to seize the Church administration in their own hands. They even advanced the political correctness of the Bolsheviks, and started on the path of open collaboration with the organs of the Cheka. But this 'rebellion' against ecclesiastical truth suffered a great defeat - the people did not follow them, and since the vile intentions of the Bolsheviks became well known, the latter were forced to change their tactics.

They even understood that the persecution of believers and the Church was repeating the glorious historical page of the Christian martyrs of the past and only strengthening the Orthodox consciousness of the Russian people.

Metropolitan Sergii, who had ascended to the direction of the Church administration, was a man of high culture and a wide diplomatic mind, a doctor of the historical sciences and of canon law. Having grasped the mood of the episcopacy, the clergy, and believers, he fulfilled Patriarch Tikhon's undertaking of the legislation of the Central Patriarchal Administration of the Russian Church. In his declaration, founded on the true religious duties of the Church, the Metropolitan announced both a refusal of the utilization of his religious convictions for political goals, and the total loyalty of the Church to the Soviet system. It must be said bluntly, that the Soviet Government was deeply interested in establishing quiet amidst the émigré circles and demanded appeals to these circles, which were under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. The Metropolitan -the locum-tenens of the Patriarch - agreed to this, because these anti-Soviet statements on the part of the émigré church activists did not have any practical meaning, but especially painfully reflected on the Church in Russia. Every anti-Soviet statement made in exile drew forth great sacrifices from among the episcopacy, the clergy, and even from the ranks of the believing intellectuals.

Briefly put, by the efforts of the Head of the Church an external agreement with the Soviet government was reached - a certain legal status of the central Church authority - though inwardly they undoubtedly remained enemies. This was clear to both sides, and Metropolitan Sergii and his co-workers did not delude themselves with the hope of the transformation of Bolshevik cruelty into any kind of mercy.

How did this benefit the Bolsheviks?

1. Having agreed to the existence of a central Church authority, they had the possibility of controlling the actions of this ecclesiastical authority. 2. To gain the general approval of the Western governments there now existed the 'facade' of a free Church within Soviet conditions.

How did this benefit the Church?

There was the possibility of a united leadership, bearing in mind the existence of ecclesiastical schisms and the atmosphere of an extreme disintegration of church discipline. The suffering Russian people knew the cost of this sacrifice, but they understood that for the preservation of Church order and life this sacrifice was necessary. These very people reached a fundamental conclusion: to unite the church masses around the genuine source of Orthodoxy. This step by the Head of the Russian Church drew forth the false conviction among the leaders of Western and exiled believing circles that for the price of the betrayal of ecclesiastical freedom, personal well-being was purchased. Life itself refuted this false view. All church activists recognized the necessity of unity with Metropolitan Sergii and they all sincerely supported his undertaking, but their destiny did not escape the cruel punishing hand of the Cheka. There also arose the conviction that the Moscow Patriarchate was not free in its ecclesiastical actions. On account of their foreign-political positions and protecting the consciousness of the 'free' religious liberties of their Soviet citizens, the Bolsheviks decided never to interfere crudely in the decision of the internal administration of ecclesiastical life. And was it really necessary for them to resort to using the Moscow Patriarchate? If the animation of ecclesiastical life in this or that place was disagreeable to them, if it was necessary to paralyze any undertaking of the Patriarchate, then the Bolsheviks resorted to their favourite method of administrative violence- the exiling of the bishop and clergymen, the closing of churches, and so forth. It should also be noted that they manifested great interest in the decisions of the Patriarchate concerning foreign questions, and then only expressed their wishes in personal conversations with the patriarchal locum-tenens. These conversations were always confidential, and were known of by hardly anyone in the Church. We knew of the Bolsheviks' personal interest to place us- for the most part the episcopacy- under their control. In that case they recommended someone from among secular people to be placed in the capacity of a secretary, a servant, a cell-attendant. Usually, we easily perceived such an appearance of 'concern' and considered it for the better to have around oneself a notorious agent, instead of a secret one who would suddenly succeed in entering into one's confidence. The Bolsheviks realized their fundamental control over ecclesiastical life through the so-called 'Commission concerning the cults'. The Central Commission was created under the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and it further descended into a network of corresponding local commissions. The composition of the Central Commission and of the local ones remained secret, but they were undoubtedly ruled by the GPU-NKVD. The Commission chose the so-called 'instructor concerning the cults', ie. a well-known lecturer who entered into the life of every community. Apart from the central ecclesiastical organ- the Patriarchate- he demanded from every unit the necessary information. Directly, they handed over to him lists of believers, forms with the names of those who had signed agreements for the use of a church and property, or concerning the composition of the clergy, and so forth. The instructor entered into certain ties with separate persons of the community, not only checking out the life of the community through them, but also the actions of the central church authority, very often discovering in her decrees objectionable sides. The Patriarchate presented information concerning the composition of its members, workers, and the status of its dioceses to the Commission under the Moscow soviet. From the above, the Patriarchate itself, as the central ecclesiastical establishment, existed, as far as the Bolsheviks were concerned, only as a prop for the sake of credulous foreigners. The Patriarchal locum-tenens, we- the episcopacy and his closest helpers reconciled ourselves with this humiliation and disgrace for the sake of the relative preservation of the Church for the Russian people and in the hope of future deliverance from the atheistic yoke. I repeat, the position itself of the Moscow Patriarchate did not protect her members from Bolshevik

persecutions at all. Many of her members suffered, many had yet to suffer, but their hour had not yet arrived, by the will of God. Metropolitan Sergii personally compared our position with chickens in the kitchen garden of a cook. The day would come when even from the small garden the next victim would be snatched. All were doomed, but the cruel cook did not lead all to the chopping block immediately. My accompanying service record will testify that I kept myself all of this time enclosed within the life of the Church, never abandoning her for a piece of bread or any personal benefit. Being the closest bishop to the Patriarchal locum-tenens, I consciously supported his heroic feat of service to the Russian Orthodox Church, and was convinced and remained convinced of the correctness of his position concerning the external state of the Church in the horrible conditions of the Soviet atheistic terror. As regards my direction of the Exarchate in the Baltic territories, evidence of it exists among the organs of the local Latvian clergy. During my three-month-long stay in Riga under Soviet control I did not have any kind of relations with the civil authorities, for the statute itself dealing with ecclesiastical communities was not introduced here by the Bolsheviks.

Sergii, Metropolitan of Lithuania Exarch for Latvia and Estonia 20 August 1941 City of Riga

The Exarch-Metropolitan Sergii's Reply to the Declaration of the Metropolitan of Moscow

We have been informed that London radio has recently broadcast the new political declaration of the Metropolitan of Moscow. In this declaration it was supposedly said that the Germans, upon seizing certain territory, are destroying the Orthodox Church and its sacred things and are persecuting the Orthodox people. Based upon this, the Metropolitan of Moscow supposedly drew the conclusion that Orthodoxy, and Christianity in general throughout the world, could only be saved by the victory of Bolshevik military might. In answer to this appalling declaration, we consider it to be our duty to say the following: During the entire time of their rule the Bolsheviks have subjected the Orthodox Church, and in general every religion, to the cruellest of persecutions. We know this by first-hand experience, for in the course of many years spent in the Soviet Union serving the Church, we were subjected repeatedly, as were others, to painful humiliations, imprisonments, and every sort of brutality, open or secret. The destructiveness of the Bolshevik persecution of the Church is irrefutably witnessed to by hundreds of thousands of executed, tortured, incarcerated, and exiled persons- true sufferers for their faith. The world has yet to see anything comparable to the Bolshevik's destructive rage against everything that is holy. All churches have been plundered by the Bolsheviks, and almost all have been profaned and closed, while many have been altogether destroyed. The Bolsheviks have closed all the monasteries and church schools without exception, they have destroyed the ecclesiastical press, and they have completely eliminated all preaching. The teaching of the Law of God has been forbidden in all schools, and children are now growing up knowing nothing about Christ, His

teaching, and His Church. And what is worse- in the last years the majority of children have not even been baptized. We can hardly be surprised, then, that under the evil rule of Bolshevism all that is holy is being uprooted from the soul, the people are being depersonalised and growing wild, and the soul of the people is dying in convulsions. The Bolsheviks are systematically exterminating Christianity. And this is natural. Communist doctrine demands this. The Bolsheviks cannot renounce their militant atheism and fierce hatred toward the Church. To do this, they would be forced to renounce communism and to cease to be Bolsheviks. This is also impossible, as impossible as it is for ice to become hot and not melt. But the Bolsheviks are capable of any kind of sham. When it comes to lying and hypocrisy, they are unsurpassable. This is their true element. In the course of only a quarter of a century, they have managed to deceive Russia and the entire world. If it would prove to be politically advantageous for them, then they would even pretend to be the defenders of Christianity. As the instrument of their lie, the Bolsheviks have now chosen the Metropolitan of Moscow. They forced him to write appeals which would be to the liking of the Archbishop of Canterbury. We have no dealings with the latter, but we know the Metropolitan of Moscow. May God be merciful to him. We are co-suffering with him, because we see that the Bolsheviks are forcing him to publicly contradict his personal convictions. And having known him for a long time, we can clearly image what horrible moral torments the Bolsheviks are using to force him to utter these false words. For he knows of no others that are worse- that without the Church Russia is a corpse, and that under the Bolsheviks the Church is in a grave, from which she can arise and in truth will arise together with her people only after and in consequence of the final destruction of the Bolshevik power. And he so clearly understands that to desire the victory of the Bolshevik army means to desire the death not only of Russia, to call for the annihilation not only of the Russian Church, but that this ultimately means to court disaster for all of Europe, and for the entire Christian world. For the victory of the Bolsheviks would be tantamount to the general destruction of Christianity. But God will not permit this victory. The Bolsheviks are doomed. The Metropolitan of Moscow cannot but know that his public declarations are casting the relationship between the Germans and the Orthodox Church in a false light. We will not speak about this question in all of its breadth, but will limit ourselves to what is happening in our ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In this district there are, first and foremost, the dioceses of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, united in the Exarchate which was entrusted by the patriarchal locum-tenens to our ecclesiastical care. Further, in our district there now exists vast Russian territory which adjoins the countries just mentioned,, limited to the east by a linear front which extends from the environs of Leningrad and the shores of Ladoga to Il'men and farther to the southeast. In this territory there are several million Russian Orthodox people, amongst which there are only about a hundred priests, but not one bishop. Such are the fruits of Bolshevik rule. We considered it our duty to bring this territory under our archpastoral protection for a while, in order slowly to begin the restoration of church life, and for this goal we sent there missionaries from our Exarchate. These were clergymen whom the Bolsheviks did not succeed in liquidating during the short time of their rule in the Baltic countries. And so we are loudly testifying that within our ecclesiastical jurisdiction the German authorities have not only not begun to struggle against the Orthodox Church, but have, on the contrary, granted her free development. In every possible way, they also have helped to lighten our difficult task of liberating Russian territory from the Bolsheviks. The German authorities are in no way violating the canonical order of our district which, as before, forms part of the Russian Orthodox Church and freely maintains prayerful communion with the locum-tenens of the Patriarchal throne. During a battle, of course, churches side by side with other buildings as well,

could suffer - this is inevitable. But the allegation that the Germans destroyed or profaned our churches with premeditation is simply slanderous. In Novgorod, it was Soviet - and not German - artillery that was exploding around St Sophia Cathedral. And this was deliberate, allowing shell after shell to explode in this ancient holy site of ours during a lull in the battle. On the contrary, the Germans returned to us those churches confiscated by the Bolsheviks. These churches had been transformed into warehouses, clubs, theatres - now they were again consecrated, and the word of God is resounding in them. The allegation that the Germans are in some manner oppressing the believing laity is also slanderous.

Sergii Metropolitan of Vilnius Exarch of Latvia

Bolshevism must be Smashed

In the world there is much evil and sorrow, but there is nothing more frightening and pernicious than Bolshevism. Bolshevism rose up against God and trampled down man. Bolshevism not only destroys but corrupts. It destroys all that is sacred and of value, by which the soul of man is alive. It transforms free persons into faceless slaves. It poisons them with its lie, and tortures them with its brutality. A country with Bolshevism is ruled by fear, hidden under the mask of a manipulated devotion and dictated enthusiasm. Fear for oneself and one's own, fear of poverty and hunger; fear of denunciation; and fear of the GPU and before each other. In a country under Bolshevism all are forced to dissemble and lie, in order to escape a swift reprisal. There people suffer not only because they are half-starving and going about in rags, exhausted by unendurable toil, not knowing any rest and nightly awaiting arrest; but they suffer all the more acutely and irrevocably because they feel themselves to be a people whose dignity has been trampled upon and who live with a contemptible fear rankling in their breasts. There they do not know the joy of free initiative, free labour, of free creativity; they do not have consolation in a free faith, in the freedom of the search for truth. In a country with Bolshevism everything is reckoned and determined from above, beginning with the doctrine of Marxism and ending with the daily schedule of compulsory work and further with the compulsory participation in public meetings of various sorts. There every person becomes the unwilling screw in the iron machine of communism. And how repulsively this machine works! Constructed with the aim of bringing order to everything, it leads everything into disorder. A schedule established to move the entire country forward in five years, brings destruction daily everywhere. Everyone fears responsibility, shifting it on the next person and thus causing stagnation in all matters. Everyone hates their forced labour, shirking it, and trying only to become a little less tired from their hateful drudgery. This resulted in the breakdown of all programmes and in constant confusion. People felt their lives becoming meaningless, ugly, and lawless, filled with gloomy boredom and irrational fear. But they did not dare admit this. They were compelled to maintain the pretence of happiness. As slaves they were ordered to proclaim that they were the most free of all the peoples on earth, that there was nothing more joyful than their suffering lives, that they loved their hateful overlords, that Bolshevik savagery was the highest form of culture, and that the Bolshevik humiliation of human personality raises one's dignity.

But they hate it all! Oh, how they hate their executioners! They did not forget, nor did they forgive their humiliations and their sufferings. And really, could they forget and forgive? Never! Russia demands requital, awaiting the hour of retribution. For victory over Bolshevism we, the Russian people, are prepared for anything. And therefore Russia awaited the war, desired the war. In the war, she saw the sole possibility to smash Bolshevism, to enter into new open space, to a free life, and to begin anew the thread of her national history - that scared thread unravelled by the Bolshevik revolution. Our Church shared this desire, because only in the military destruction of Bolshevism did she see the path to her liberation. She was almost smothered by the persecutions heaped on her and survived, I am determined to say, by a miracle; a miracle of that simple, heartfelt, unlearned faith which the Russian people succeeded in preserving in their heart, despite all the efforts of the Bolshevik program-makers. If the Bolsheviks would now succeed in winning the war, then the Russian Church would be doomed to destruction. Driven into a corner by German arms, the Bolsheviks realised that they could not drive their slaves into battle only by machine-guns, or excite them only by the slogans of communism. In Russia, no one has believed in these slogans for a long time. And so the Bolsheviks began to speak of the defence of the Homeland and Faith, appealing to feelings of Russian patriotism and Orthodox religious sentiment. They were convinced of the strength of these feelings in the Russian people, and decided to exploit them. But they did not forgive the Russian people for these feelings. For whoever had these feelings rejected and hated both Bolshevik godlessness and the Communist International. The vitality of these feelings in the Russian people manifested the failure of Bolshevism, its cruel persecutions and crazed propaganda. In the event of its victory, Bolshevism will avenge this failure - it will disperse the Russian people throughout the world, destroy all the churches, and annihilate the Russian clergy to the last man. For Bolshevism cannot change or be regenerated. Its satanic nature is immutable and unchangeable. Only naive people, deceived by Bolshevism and completely misunderstanding its essence, could think otherwise. There are no such people in Russia. But unfortunately, one can meet such people abroad, where they have neither experienced Bolshevism, nor encountered it face to face. The mendacity of Bolshevism surpasses all probability. There are people who cannot imagine such deceitfulness. And they accept the assurances of the Bolsheviks at face value. They think that, indeed, Bolshevism entered the war not for the sake of international revolution and the universal triumph of the Communist International, but for the Homeland, the Faith and the freedom of the people - especially the Slavs; for the self-determination of national culture and the salvation of European civilisation and so forth- in a word, for everything that is dear to the opponents of Bolshevism and hateful to itself, for everything about which Bolshevik propaganda so importunately clamours, yet insightfully allowing for the fact that by the open propagation of internationalism, communism, and atheism it cannot presently attract to its side public opinion in either allied Bolshevik, hostile, or neutral countries. And so with unparalleled cynicism, Soviet propaganda is now shouting out the very slogans for which the Bolsheviks have shot a million people, and for which, in the event of their victory, they will yet shoot many more millions. 'Only let us win, and then we will settle all accounts' - this is the fundamental principle of the contemporary wartime propaganda of the Bolsheviks. And the world will suffer if it does not understand this and deceives itself! The Bolsheviks are forcing the Church to be their accomplice in order to further promote this deception. They are forcing the Church to call for a war against the Bolsheviks' enemies, though they themselves are the cruellest of her persecutors. This persecution is so monstrous that some people are incapable of imagining its possibility and are therefore inclined to think that, indeed, the Church in the Soviet Union is now free and that on her own initiative

and conviction is calling upon the believing people in Russia and beyond her borders to arise in the defence of godless Bolshevism. But surely everyone understands that this assumption is absolutely absurd, that it is impossible for any kind of Church to support atheism by its own will. Be assured that the voice of the Church resounding out of Russia now is counterfeit. It is not her voice at all. It is the voice of the Bolsheviks speaking in her name. They squeeze the throat of the Church for the words, they need. But the Church cannot speak the words she desires to. Yet I hear these unsaid words. Here is what they say: 'Whoever believes in God - help us! Never believe the Bolsheviks about anything! We are in captivity, we are being tortured! They are forcing us to lie! Forgive us, for you have not experienced what we are experiencing! Do not nail the Church into a grave! Do not nail Russia into a grave! Destroy the Bolsheviks! May God reward you for this! If the Bolsheviks prevail, then we will both perish!' Do not think that this authentic voice of the Church exists only in my imagination and that I am speaking about something of which I do not know. No, I know what is happening in the Soviet Union and I know that there the Church is suffering. I know also the mind of the Church, for I have come from there. Until 1941 - the time of my appointment to Riga - I lived in Moscow and intimately participated in the labours of the Patriarchate, carrying a common cross with my fellow brother-bishops. I know of the horror there to this very day, and everything of which I am speaking is grounded in my personal experience, accumulated at that altar, in a cell, in prison, and in many years of personal contact with archpastors, pastors, and the laity of Russia scattered throughout various cities and villages. I have the right to witness to the local life and expectations of the people and churchmen, and I am obliged to do this, so that by my silence I do not render indirect assistance to the diffusion of Bolshevik lies and the perpetuation of Bolshevik persecution. And do not imagine that the words which I am speaking were prompted or dictated by someone from the side. No, I am absolutely free - as free as is my three-million member flock in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and the vast Russian province from Leningrad to Pskov and father south. The German army brought them this freedom, having driven out the Bolsheviks. Now that, as before, we are in canonical dependence to the Mother Church in Russia, we are able to work in the vineyard of Christ unhindered. The Germans have returned what the Bolsheviks have deprived us of. They have returned to us the churches taken away by the Bolsheviks and we are now able to serve and preach in them with freedom; they have returned to us the right, abolished by the Bolsheviks, to teach the Law of God in secular schools, to establish our own schools for the preparation of pastors, and to publish an unlimited number of books and newspapers with religious content. And in truth, according to our strength, we use all of these rights of ours - we use them and thank God Who has granted us such freedom. We do not want to lose this freedom. Freedom is as dear to us as the air we breathe, as life itself. Listen to what the believers in our Russian villages and cities are saying: 'We will bear anything - not only Bolshevism!' And again: 'There is no sacrifice that is too dear to us, if it leads to victory over Bolshevism!' You have not experienced Bolshevism. Perhaps it is not very easy for you to understand us. But we know that an ally of Bolshevism is an enemy of God and humanity. And whoever is able to participate in the struggle against Bolshevism, but does not because of one pretext or another, indirectly supports Bolshevism and - whether he likes it or not - he is helping those who are crucifying and tormenting the Church of Christ. Do not believe them or their agents, or those who assure you that we here are suffering from oppression and only dreaming of the return of the Bolsheviks. This is simply a shameless lie! We, all of us, are praying for victory over Bolshevism, for the liberation of the Church and Homeland from the communist yoke, for the gift of strength in this struggle with them, and for blessings upon those who enter into this struggle. And we believe

that the Lord will have mercy upon the Russian people and upon those people who come to our assistance; we believe that Bolshevism will be destroyed, that humanity will be saved from it, and that that Church of God will arise to a new, free and joyful life.

Sergii Metropolitan of Lithuania and Vilnius Patriarchal Exarch of Latvia and Estonia 14 May 1943

The Church in the USSR before the War

The self-appointed goal of the Bolsheviks was to obliterate Christianity. Renunciation of this task would have been tantamount to self-destruction for Bolshevism. Such a renunciation was inconceivable. This is clear to everyone who realizes the satanic essence of Bolshevism. From what source were statements taken that Bolshevism had reconciled itself with Christianity and had even supposedly come forward as its defender? The Bolsheviks themselves set these rumours in motion, considering such a masquerade as beneficial for themselves due to the nature of the times. And even earlier, in the interests of their foreign propaganda, they feigned innocence concerning the persecution of the Church. The lie, together with brutality, was always their favourite weapon of political action. Besides the lie and brutality, Bolshevism availed itself of no other means. Only by these means did it wage war against Christianity. With these tools it attempted to root out the Orthodox faith from the Russian soul. But the Russian soul did not betray its faith. And therefore, one can look to the Russian future with hope. The Orthodox Church stood and stands on guard of the Russian soul. She herself was struck by some of the most terrible blows of Bolshevism. It subjected the Church to the worst possible brutality and entangled her with pernicious deception. But it enkindled in the Church the reciprocal strength of a confessing and suffering heroism. And this spiritual strength, the strength of righteousness is unconquerable. The flame of faith which was arising anew in the churches blazed up on the former ruins. Bolshevism directed its blows against all aspects of ecclesiastical life. It drove away, exiled, and annihilated almost the entire clergy and those members of the laity who were distinguished by their work for the Church; it closed all the monasteries and almost all of the churches; it liquidated all educational and charitable institutions of the Church; expropriated ecclesiastical property; prohibited church publications; deprived believers of the right to conduct religious propaganda, ie. the right to defend and spread their faith; and organized and conducted a violent atheistic propaganda. Bolshevism expended special efforts to destroy the internal organization of the Church. To achieve this, it first reduced the organization of the Church to a position of illegality, and thus unrecognized by the State. The established Church, her canonical structure, her hierarchy, her organs, her membership in the Universal Church, and her subdivision into dioceses, deaneries, and parishes were all concepts unknown to the Soviet law. To allude to such concepts in their relationship with the Soviet State was both juridically inadmissible and practically useless. Only the so-called 'groups of twenty', which were at the head of separate churches, legally existed in the Soviet Union and these groups of twenty laymen were in no way obliged to submit even to the Patriarchate. At least this is how conditions remained until the war. From that time, perhaps, there occurred some kind of 'decorative'

changes in their relationship of which, however, I know nothing definite and of which, therefore, I am unable to say anything. I speak only of what I know by my own experience acquired in the pre-war years when I personally participated in the struggles of the Patriarchate. But I do not doubt that if some kind of changes did occur in the position of the Church then, from the Bolshevik's perspective, this was only a new simulation or a new form of malicious deception by which they always shrouded their relationship to the Church. In actuality, the position of the Church could not have changed and, of course, would not change as long as the Bolsheviks ruled in Russia. What is this 'group of twenty'? It is twenty laymen or laywomen who were personally responsible for directing, under extremely difficult conditions, a nationalized church temporarily leased to them by the State for the organization of public liturgical services. The realization of just such a procedure to open a church so that the religious rites could be served in it depended upon the local 'commission concerning the cults'. It was also dependent upon this commission as to whether or not a church was to be closed at any given moment and, circumventing the authority of the corresponding group of twenty, dismiss it from its direction. Equally as well, the commission could, without closing the church, turn it over from one group of twenty to another even if they did not belong to the same faith, or in specific cases, to the same- using the Soviet expression - 'religious orientation'. The commission concerning the cults used this right extensively, as for example when they forcibly took churches away from believers of the 'Tikhonite orientation' and handed them over to supporters of the 'Renovationist orientation'. The commissions were made up almost exclusively of party members active in the League of the Godless. The commission set itself the goal of stifling the religious life of the population, over which it was commissioned to direct a most severe supervision. In particular, the commission directed the registration of the entire local clergy. One must bear in mind, that according to Soviet law, the right to celebrate the religious rites was granted only to those priests who were registered in the corresponding commission of the cults. They could exercise this right in that church to which they had been assigned as a priestly celebrant by the commission - to celebrate the religious rites in other churches or outside of the churches was strictly forbidden to them. To all intents and purposes the group of twenty is totally dependent upon the commission of the cults. The composition of a group of twenty contained Soviet agents who reported to their superiors about everything in the church, including the behaviour of the clergy and believers. The slightest carelessness or impropriety in the implementation of those conditions in which a given church was turned over to the management of a group of twenty was sufficient to cause the church's closure, and the registered clergy, members of the twenty and others who had ties with the church, to be exiled. The church had to be maintained in good condition by the group of twenty and could be closed if the authorities found that its appearance was not properly kept up. This always gave the authorities the possibility of closing the church under the pretence that it was in danger of collapsing on the congregation- for appearance's sake this was done by means of an official act. Arbitrarily closing the churches under such false pretences, the Bolsheviks contended that this measure was in no way an act of struggle against religion, but rather one exclusively concerned with the safety of the believing congregation. The use of a church for liturgical services was regarded, essentially, as a lucrative business undertaken by the group of twenty; as a 'milking' by it and the clergy of great profits from the population and its 'religious prejudices' or, to put it better, as a kind of shameful trade which the State tolerated as a temporary necessity. But, showing such condescension to this deep-rooted 'vice of religiosity', the State strove to render it harmless by extracting from the church or, more precisely, from the group of twenty, a huge tax which must have devoured the entire net income of their 'religious

enterprises'. The payment involved the closure of a church. This allowed the authorities, with the pretence of its non-payment, to close churches, again contending that this was being done not for the sake of the struggle against religion, but exclusively for the defence of the material interests of the believing population against exploitation by 'religious speculators'. Such an excessive tax was exacted from the clergy. The income of the clergy was considered as unearned, as if to say, fraudulent. The tax had the goal of removing from the clergy this 'shameful' income, leaving them with a subsistence wage. On this foundation, the Bolsheviks contended that this taxation pressure placed on the clergy in no way served as a measure in the struggle against religion, but was only a necessary means of the social self-defence against the avarice of the 'priests'. A priest, not paying the tax by the appointed date, was excluded from the registration list and deprived of the right to celebrate the public liturgical services. Arbitrarily raising the rate of the tax, if possible of every clergyman, so that the believers could not help him, put him in a condition wherein with the appearance of legality the priest was removed from the cathedral. In the majority of cases the authorities in just such a manner rid themselves of the most popular and authoritative priests who refused to enter into their service, and yet were so cautious in their activities as to rule out a political indictment which could have even a shadow of verisimilitude. However, political crimes were often charged against clergymen without the slightest foundations. An objectionable clergyman is simply accused of counter-revolutionary activities, although he has never committed any, or of hostile intentions, although he has never had any, and for this they judge him and then exile or imprison him. Bear in mind, that even of this practice the Bolsheviks said again and again that in no way was it a measure in the struggle against religion, but only a weapon by which people of the revolution defended themselves against their political enemies. Actually, according to the letter of the law, celebrating the religious rites, as such, was still not a criminal offence- precisely speaking, there existed the notorious 'guarantee of the freedom of the cult' - and formally the priesthood was not punished for this, but for a host of other types of activity. In reality, the clergy were pursued precisely for their ecclesiastical activities, but, according to an edict of the Stalin constitution, the game being played out was that they were being pursued for crimes unconnected with these activities. The celebration of religious rites, as we have mentioned, was allowed in no other than those churches specified for this. To serve in other places was to invite punishment. Secret religious rites therefore entailed a great risk. Stricken from the registration list a priest found himself unable to continue his service and deprived of the means of subsistence. To find other was difficult for him, for he was considered socially discredited because of his membership in the clergy. This shame spread to his children. In order to find his daily bread and relieve the lot of his children, he was forced to cover up his past and, so as to find work, fill out the obligatory forms with false evidence. This again entailed a great risk, because his exposure inevitably meant a cruel reprisal for him. The very appointment of a priest to a church formally depended upon the group of twenty, employing him for a determined fee. But, the decisive word actually belonged to the commission of the cults, which could, according to its judgement, refuse to register him. Not having secured the assent of the commission beforehand, it was not even worth presenting him for registration. Thus, the entire clergy was dependent upon the arbitrary will of the Bolsheviks, who allowed some to serve legally, but removed others, naturally preferring the worst over the better. Under such conditions a registered priest lived in the unceasing expectation of repressions. With trembling, day and night, he expected arrest, after which could follow exile or imprisonment. Fear in the face of arrest was so great, that people not possessing any remarkable strength of moral character were prepared to enter into any bargain with their conscience and to

grovel before the Bolsheviks, if the latter would only leave them in peace. Therefore, among the surviving clergy registered by the Soviet authorities there remained relatively few truly steadfast unbroken persons, true to their lofty calling to the end. The registered priest attached to a church committed himself to celebrate the liturgical services. Officially, this was his only role. He had no authority at all. He had no administrative rights. Everything was arranged and taken care of by the group of twenty, which had full authority to order the clergy about as they so desired. The twenty was not subjected to any kind of control from the side of the parishioners. It even imposed its will upon them. Therefore everything depended on the personal characteristics of the twenty's composition and on the skill of the parish dean to be on good terms with it. If the composition of the group of twenty was good, and if the parish dean possessed sufficient moral authority, then everything would proceed, more or less, beneficially. In such a case, the twenty would be transformed into a kind of parish council under the dean, who, contrary to the official-juridical situation of things, would direct the parish and its life. On the other hand when the twenty is composed of people of a minimal churchly stability and enough - then the life of the parish is extremely abnormal, completely free from the control of the clergy, and the latter have absolutely no authority or the possibility to direct it. Under such conditions the commissions of the cults control the groups of twenty sufficiently enough so that according to its request, but disregarding the will of the parishioners, a renovationist priest instead of an Orthodox priest will be registered for a given church. In other words, the church will be taken from the Orthodox Church and handed over to the Renovationists, to those schismatics or, better to say, heretics, who have deviated far from pure Orthodoxy and, together, with this, have obviously become agents of the Bolsheviks. We recall that Patriarch Tikhon forbade the Renovationist clergy to enter into pastoral service, and that they were defrocked. Equally, the group of twenty could, having reached an agreement with the commission of the cults, register in the ranks of the clergy for a church such a person who, though not belonging to the Renovationists, still did not have the canonical right to serve. For example, a clergyman who for some fault was banned from serving as a priest by episcopal authority; or who was defrocked; or even simply a self-styled priest who never even belonged to the ordained ministry. The commission of the cults, whose mission it was to struggle against Orthodoxy, would agree to register just such a person with great willingness, or incite and force the group of twenty to apply for his registration. Episcopal authority could not struggle against such a penetration of various imposters into the parish clergy. Indeed, according to Soviet law the bishops in general had no real authority of any kind. In this regard, the illegal position of the church reflected upon her life especially painfully. The lack of rights of the bishops meant that the Bolsheviks could absolutely ignore the episcopal structure of the Orthodox Church and in general recognize not the least juridical authority for her canons. On principle, the Bolsheviks considered the canons to be the organizational regulations of an illegal, or to put it strongly, of a forbidden association. The Church exists in the Soviet Union as an illegal fact - for she has no acknowledged right to exist according to the State. Therefore, in official Soviet speech, even the very expression 'The Orthodox Church' is absent. From the point of view of Soviet laws, the Orthodox Church, as a legally organized whole, is non-existent, but is only an uncoordinated, and so an unorganized, group of believers of the 'Tikhonite orientation', to which it is allowed, according to the observance of definite laws, to gather for liturgical services in the churches designated for this. Those priests who were registered in a corresponding church as 'servants of the cult' had the right to serve in it the desired rite - 'cultic acts' - and others had the right to be present at the fulfillment of these acts. They had no other rights. Only in this did the 'freedom of the cult' consist, as recognized by the Stalinist constitution.

From what was said above, one was certain that the so-called 'freedom of the cult' was hemmed in by conditions which made it completely illusory, guaranteeing nothing to practice, but being constantly and brutally violated. At this time it must be especially emphasised that the 'freedom of the cult' in no manner whatsoever meant freedom of belief or of religious conscience. In particular, 'freedom of the cult' did not grant the least right to organize the life of a religious community on the basis of its religious profession, nor even the right that such communities in general could exist. The cult was torn away from its organic bond with religious life. It is difficult to imagine greater brutality against the religious conscience. In particular, for the Orthodox such a situation developed that here and there they could still legally celebrate the services according to their rite - however, before the war the assigned Orthodox churches already hardly remained - but with this they could not legally fulfill the demands of the faith concerning the canonical structure of the Church. They could only fulfill these demands in an illegal manner. In particular, this concerns the existence of, and submission to, the ecclesiastical authority of the bishops. Officially in the Soviet Union there simply are no bishops, and the very word 'bishop' is unknown to the jargon of Soviet laws. The Bolsheviks established only one expression, namely 'servants of the cult', for the designation of the various orders of the clergy of all the confessions of faith. All of the servants of the cult have equal rights, or to put it better, are equally without rights. In this situation there are essentially no differences between deacons, priests, and bishops. Each of them has the right to complete the 'cultic acts' in the church for which they have been registered - but possess absolutely no rights beyond this. Not one of them may issue any kind of orders. If a citizen who is by profession a server of the cult - for example, a bishop - refers to the 'regulations' of one of the confessions - for example, the canons - and issues an order to other citizens who are perhaps servants of the same confession - priests, for example - then, according to the Bolsheviks he reveals himself to be a criminal for encroaching upon the freedom of these citizens and for violating the State monopoly by issuing such orders, and for attempting to establish organized associations forbidden by the State. For this they are subjected to criminal punishment. And if citizens are found who confess of similar orders issuing from the servant of the cult, then they too are subjected to repressions - for, on the one hand, revealing their participation in such an illegal association, and on the other for revealing socially 'retarded', and therefore dangerous, ideas. They are thus so damaged by 'religious prejudices' that they imagine themselves obliged to submit to certain orders, issuing not from the State authority but from the servants of the cult, to whom, on account of a harmful misunderstanding, they ascribe special properties, rights, and titles - especially to the bishops. Bearing in mind the above, legally a bishop did not have any kind of flock and, in particular, any clergymen under his authority. He did not have the right to issue any sort of orders in his diocese. According to the law, the groups of twenty were completely independent of him and between them there were no ties of an organizational relationship. They voluntarily belonged to the 'Tikhonite orientation', but they had no right to draw any juridical conclusions from this. The result of such a system must be one of a full paralysis of episcopal authority and absolute disorder in diocesan life. And indeed, as far as the Bolsheviks were concerned, actual dioceses only existed in the imagination of the believing people - the law did not know such organizations. It goes without saying that believers cannot assent to such a situation. And therefore all dioceses continue to exist illegally. The Bolsheviks are forced to live with this fact. They know that among the servants of the cult several of them acknowledge the bishops, and that priests and members of the twenties appeal to them for orders, receive them, and then pretend that they received no such orders. They would then take the corresponding measures according to their personal discretion. In a number of cases, especially if

no one from among the believers protest, the Bolsheviks close their eyes to everything. They close their eyes, for example, when a group of twenty submits a petition to register a certain priest, or to replace him by another and so forth, by receiving an episcopal blessing for this beforehand. But is sufficient for a trouble-maker to make a denunciation, and the very same bishop and those obedient to his orders will suffer repressions for such actions. Therefore, the realisation of episcopal authority is virtually dependent upon two conditions - on the absolute good-willed readiness of believers to support their bishop and on the mutual trust between the bishop and them - a trust which allows both him and them not to fear denunciations. However, such a trust could never be absolute. The actualisation of episcopal authority always remained a risk. In certain instances the bishop could take such a risk, in others he could not, finding the risk to be excessively great. Therefore, episcopal authority is often forced to be inactive; it cannot show itself consistently and evenly, and manifests itself only under favourable circumstances. In connection with this, there is an absence of regularity in the clerical work of the diocese. In general, diocesan councils, departments, and chanceries do not exist - these are all hindered by the very illegality of the diocese. There is no flow of regular correspondence concerning diocesan matters. Everything is managed by the bishop himself, who prefers to do this orally, so as not to leave any written evidence. And for this oral management of business it is required that priests or members of the twenty come to the bishop from their places. In view of this fact that the dioceses are vast, but that citizens are constrained in their movement, these trips to the bishop have character of being more or less accidental. One had to make use of every suitable opportunity which sometimes one was forced to wait a long time for. Under such conditions, the direction of the diocese was deprived of any regularity and was transformed into a kind of continuous improvisation. In light of the conditions described, one need not be surprised that church discipline was shaken, but that it was not altogether destroyed. The main credit in this situation belongs to the very body of believing people who demanded from their pastors purity of faith and valid liturgical services. The Living Church movement collapsed, before all else, on account of the opposition of believers, who poured out of the Renovationist's churches. And by this censure, which led to the emptying of these churches and the impoverishment of the clergy, the believers forced the clergy and the group of twenty to consider ecclesiastical discipline, even if in a small manner. What is more, the passive opposition of the believers turned out to be a fact of such great significance, that even the Bolsheviks had to take account of it. Not wishing to annoy the believing mass excessively, the Bolsheviks were forced to reconcile themselves with the existence of Orthodoxy and with its victory over the Renovationists and to change their tactics in the struggle with the Church significantly. It became clear that it was impossible to take the Church by an open, lightning-like assault, but it was necessary to subject her by a slow systematic siege. This even allowed the Church, altogether with great losses, to survive up to the present war, having preserved within herself a small measure of organization- ie. to gain time and patiently await those circumstances permitting her, for well-grounded reasons, to hope for the swift destruction of Bolshevism and, together with this, for the liberation, restoration, and revival of the Church. Feasibly to delay and slow down the destruction of the Church undertaken by the Bolsheviks, was always the main task of the Patriarchate. It strove to protect the dogmatic purity and canonical integrity of Orthodoxy, to overcome schisms, to preserve the canonically valid succession of the supreme ecclesiastical authority, to maintain the canonically valid succession of the supreme ecclesiastical authority, to maintain the canonically valid position of the Russian Church amidst the other autocephalous Churches, and to lead, in such a manner, the church to a better future when, following the destruction of Bolshevism, the Church

will be able to rise to a new life. In order to work for the fulfillment of this task, it was incumbent upon the Patriarchate, before all else, to preserve its own existence which was threatened by a great danger. Indeed, denying the existence of the Church as a legal organization, the Bolsheviks consistently had to deny the legal existence of the Patriarchate as well. From the time of the arrest of Patriarch Tikhon (1922) the Bolsheviks entered precisely upon this path, from which they were never deflected, both from after his liberation from arrest (1923), and right up to his very death (1925). But simultaneously Bolsheviks staged the establishment of something which was of benefit to themselves - the 'Living Church' - having legalized the supreme organ of its administration. The immediate task...[of the Bolsheviks] was the replacement or absorption of Orthodoxy by the Renovationists. For this goal they made a whole series of attempts to hand over into the hands of the Renovationists the administration of the Orthodox Church. Under Patriarch Tikhon not one of these attempts succeeded. The Patriarchate, although illegal, continued to exist, and the Bolsheviks found it expedient to take this fact into account. They acted so for two reasons: (i) abroad, they referred to the existence of the Patriarchate as evidence that, despite their atheism, they supposedly did not subject the Church to persecutions; (ii) they calculated that, nevertheless, it would turn out well for them to hand over the Patriarchate into the hands of their agents the Renovationists, thus destroying the Church from within. After the death of Patriarch Tikhon, and under the locum-tenens Metropolitan Peter (1925), the Bolsheviks continued their attempts in this direction, but they did not achieve success. Metropolitan Peter was banished to Siberia by the Bolsheviks and shortly afterwards died in exile. But before his arrest he succeeded in appointing a successor to himself in the person of Metropolitan Sergii. The latter, having shown himself to be somewhat unyielding, was imprisoned (1926). But before his arrest he providently appointed a whole row of successors, who had to consecutively take upon themselves the responsibility of the leadership of the Church. However, the Bolsheviks began to subject one after another of them to arrest, so that the Church lived without a leader and her business fell into total confusion. This was the period when the Patriarchate simply did not exist at all, but what did exist - and this legally - was the Renovationist administration, to which, however, the Orthodox Church did not submit herself. This situation turned out to be awkward for the Bolsheviks themselves. On one side it compromised them abroad, hindering their success in propaganda there. On the other side the Bolsheviks were convinced of the weakness of Renovationism, of its unacceptability for stifling the majority of the Orthodox, of the impossibility of controlling the Orthodox Church with the help of the Renovationists. Therefore, the Bolsheviks decided to enter into a compromise with Metropolitan Sergii, who, from his side, also came to the conclusion that a compromise was necessary for the restoration of the canonical administration of the Church, and her liberation from the domination of the Renovationists. This compromise took place in 1927, and included Metropolitan Sergii's declaration that the loyalty of believers to the Soviet State was an obligation (Patriarch Tikhon had declared this earlier). The Bolsheviks registered the Patriarchate as a legal institution, abandoning all attempts to hand it over to the Renovationists. [This followed the] release of Metropolitan Sergii from prison, which granted him the possibility of fulfilling his responsibility as the Patriarchal locum-tenens. Thus, the price of the political declaration of Metropolitan Sergii was paid for by the legalisation of the Patriarchate and the liberation of the Church from Renovationist domination. It was according to this model that further relationships between the Patriarchate and the Soviet State were built. When the Bolsheviks demanded certain political steps from Metropolitan Sergii, he accepted their demands only on the condition of this or that indulgence for the Church. I will relate an especially clear

example. In 1930 Metropolitan Sergii was forced to grant an interview to foreign journalists, and according to the demands of the Bolsheviks he was to announce in this interview that the Church in the Soviet Union was completely free and not subjected to persecution. Metropolitan Sergii agreed to fulfill this demand of the Bolsheviks on the condition that Orthodox priests would not be subjected to the dispossession of the kulaks, such as was happening at that time, and this condition was actually fulfilled by the Bolsheviks. At the cost of this humiliating interview (during which agents of the GPU stood listening behind a wall), Metropolitan Sergii saved many village priests – at that time they still numbered around ten thousand - from destruction and death. This example reveals that the Soviet authorities and the Patriarchate opposed each other as two hostile powers, forced - each for their reasons - to enter into a mutual compromise. But the Bolsheviks clearly carried more weight in the compromise. With time this has become ever more obvious. Having at first agreed to this compromise, and to certain concessions to the Church, the Bolsheviks subsequently deceived the Patriarchate, making these concessions illusory. Thus, no longer treating the rural clergy as dispossessed kulaks, and after an interval of time, the Bolsheviks simply began sending clergymen into exile in great numbers and closing churches under the pretence of certain legalities - most often for non-payment of a deliberately back-breaking tax. It must be said that the very legalization of the Patriarchate did not justify, in practice, those original expectations, since it was only the Patriarchate which became legalized. This resulted in an absolutely paradoxical situation: the Patriarchate turned out to be the legal organ of an illegal organization. The Patriarchate was enabled to speak in the name of an unacknowledged Church and to legally issue orders which, however, were not juridicially obligatory. The parish clergy and the groups of twenty preserved the full possibility to ignore the Patriarchate if they so chose. Neither the groups of twenty, nor the parish clergy of the individual churches, were formally subjected to the Patriarchate. They all remained under the exclusive authority of the corresponding local commissions of the cults, with which the patriarchate could not communicate. What has been said applies equally well, to the episcopacy. A bishop, even though he belonged to the structure of the Patriarchate - including evidently, the locum-tenens of the Patriarchal throne himself- was subjected, as was every 'servant of the cult', to be registered for a particular church, for which he had to apply to the corresponding commission of the cults. Therefore, without the agreement of the commission of the cults not a single bishop could be appointed, transferred, dismissed -not to mention the fact that every one of them could at any time be imprisoned and exiled. The bishops, including those of the inner structure of the Patriarchate, were held fast in the grip of the Bolsheviks. Working in the Patriarchate, we compared our position with the position of chickens in a kitchen garden. The cook snatches his next victim from them - one today, another tomorrow, but not all immediately. We understood perfectly well that the Bolsheviks tolerated the existence of the Patriarchate only for the sake of its own advantage, primarily propagandistic, and that we were forced to be the almost powerless spectators of the continuous suffocation of the Church by the Bolsheviks. But, for the sake of the Church, we were all reconciled to our humiliating position, hoping in her ultimate invincibility and trying to preserve her until better times - until the downfall of Bolshevism. In this, we were strengthened by the realization that the believing people, by willingly submitting to our authority, themselves helped us to maintain on a canonical foundation a certain minimal order in the Church, not allowing her to crumble. This submission to the direction of the Patriarchate could not be imputed to the believers as an illegal act because the Bolsheviks themselves legalized the Patriarchate. The Patriarchate remained the sole legalized organ of ecclesiastical administration, and therefore only the Patriarchate preserved the possibility to rightly order the life of the Church

and hinder destruction by the Bolsheviks. We did not want this opportunity to escape us, because we saw in it a definite practical value, the repudiation of which, in our judgement, the Church should not have allowed. Even now I think that we did not err in this regard. But all of our efforts, sufferings, and humiliations will turn out to be, of course, in vain, if godless Bolshevism does not fall. With its fall are tied all the hopes of the Orthodox Russian people. I believe that the Lord will not confound our hopes.

The Patriarchal Exarch - Metropolitan Sergii A true copy of the original.