



Note: This Work has been made available by the authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research and may not be copied or reproduced except as permitted by the copyright laws of Canada without the written authority from the copyright owner.

Walsh, Isaac. "Christianity in Russia: Surviving the Communist Persecution Under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1941." BA Honours (History and Global Studies), Tyndale University, 2021.

Christianity in Russia: Surviving the Communist Persecution Under Lenin and Stalin, 1917–1941

Isaac Walsh

Honours Thesis HIST 4973-4993

Department of History and Global Studies,

Tyndale University

April 21, 2021

Contents

Acknowledgments2
Introduction3
Chapter 1: An Institutional Church8
Chapter 2: The Bolshevik Assault26
Chapter 3: Revival, Decimation, and Endurance46
Conclusion67
Bibliography72

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my Mom and Dad for their continued love, prayers, and assistance during my time at school. Their support has been essential for allowing me to complete these four years and has been greatly encouraging on a personal level. This project is the culmination of a long period of education, of which both of my parents had an integral role in due to the ten years of homeschooling that they gave me.

I also want to thank Dr. Brad Faught for participating in this project as my advisor. His guidance and assistance have been greatly appreciated on my part, as well as his willingness to lend me some of his books during a time where it is much more difficult to acquire source material.

Introduction

“...they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake” (Luke 21:12 ESV)

The Lord Jesus Christ gave this promise to His Church two-thousand years ago, and the history of the Christian Church reveals the fulfillment of this promise. The early Church was persecuted by the Jewish religious establishment as well as numerous Roman emperors. Medieval Christians under Islamic rule found themselves reduced to pariah status and were frequently enslaved or killed. Church Reformers such as Jan Hus and William Tyndale were executed by the Roman Catholic Church for their attempts to make the Word of God accessible to the general population, and their fate was shared by many other Reformers. The Roman Catholic Church suffered grievously under the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century; thousands were sent to the guillotine and Catholic influence in France has never fully recovered. Today, Christians continue to face persecution, whether it be “hard persecution” where Christians are killed for their beliefs or “soft persecution” where Christians are becoming increasingly ostracized for opposing the increasing liberalization of modern society.

This project will examine the nature of one of the most severe and bloody suppressions of the Church in history: the persecution of Russian Christians under Bolshevik rule between 1917

and 1941. This persecution was directed mainly against the Eastern Orthodox Church, as that Church accounted for the vast majority of believers in Russia.¹ Christians of other denominational backgrounds also suffered grievously, but the Orthodox Church was the primary enemy for the communists.² This was due to its deep influence in Russian history and the Russian population, as well as its previous position of being the State Church under the Czars. The Bolsheviks sought to bring about a radical transformation in Russia, targeting its political structure, its economics, its culture, and its religion. The Orthodox Church was a major obstacle to the Bolshevik's vision for Russia, and this resulted in the Church being suppressed as an "enemy of the Revolution."

Many scholars have examined this topic and have made several important contributions. Orlando Figes has written several major books on the history of Russia. One such work, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution*, analyzes the collapse of the Czarist Empire and the Leninist era of the Soviet Union.³ Here, Figes focuses on the political, social, and economic factors that were involved at that time, but he does not ignore the impact the Bolshevik Revolution had on the Orthodox Church. This is important, as many Soviet decisions that determined their stance towards religion were influenced by the economic and political situations that the nation found itself in. Dmitry Pospielovsky focuses on the Soviet government's anti-religious policies in *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime* and *Soviet Anti-Religious*

¹ Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union: A Sociological Study*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), pp. 30–31. The Eastern Orthodox Church officially calls itself the “Eastern Catholic Church”, but the paper will use the term “Eastern Orthodox Church” to avoid confusion for Western readers.

² Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 46–47.

³ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 100th Anniversary Edition*. (London: The Bodley Head, Penguin Random House UK, 2017).

Campaigns and Persecutions.⁴ In these books, Pospielovsky offers a detailed exposition of how the Bolsheviks sought to suppress the Church, as well as the ecclesiastical infighting that the Church struggled with during that time. Christine Chaillot, in her book *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* has compiled several essays on the struggles that the Orthodox Church faced during Soviet rule.⁵ Those essays were written by modern Orthodox bishops, and therefore they offer a uniquely Orthodox perspective on the persecution they had to endure. Serge Bolshakoff has written on the commonly overlooked topic of the state of non-Orthodox Christians during this time in his book *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of "Unofficial" Religion in Russia*. His work reveals that although they were few in number compared to their Orthodox counterparts, they held considerable influence which caused the Bolsheviks to seek to eliminate them as well.⁶ Finally, Daniel Peris focuses on the Soviet government's attempt to create an "atheist church" to replace the Orthodox Church in his book *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless*.⁷ Instead of having a society that was grounded in religious belief, the Soviet government sought to create a materialistic society that found its strength in science and technology. However, the Soviet government struggled to make this new ideology appealing to the average citizen.

This project will examine the specific methods the Bolsheviks used to persecute the Orthodox Church, their effectiveness, and how the Church responded to the persecution. Other

⁴ Dimitry Pospielovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982 Volume 1*. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984) and Dimitry Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies. A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, V. 1. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987).

⁵ Christine Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).

⁶ Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of "Unofficial" Religion in Russia*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950).

⁷ Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

Christian denominations will also be briefly addressed, but the focus will be on the Orthodox Church due to it accounting for the majority of Russian Christians, as well as its importance on Russian life, history, and society. It will be shown that the Church was able to survive the communist onslaught by implementing a series of reforms, and that the Bolsheviks greatly underestimated the resilience of the people's faith. This will be accomplished by addressing three historical periods in three chapters. The first chapter will examine the reign of Czar Nicholas II and the privileged position the Orthodox Church held under his rule from 1894 until 1917. Although this is outside the communist era, it is necessary to present the pre-revolution position of the Church in order to understand its struggles and responses. The second chapter will analyze the rise of Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks during the "October Revolution" in 1917 and how they began to enforce a communist worldview on Russia. This will introduce the first instances of persecution in Russia, as well as the Church's initial response. Finally, the third chapter will begin with Stalin's rise to power in 1924 and conclude with the onset of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. This chapter will examine the political and economic transformation that Stalin enforced on the nation through a reign of terror, and how the Church was impacted by these new repressions.

A couple preliminary distinctions are also necessary. The first is to clarify the specific usage of the terms "Church" and "church". This paper will use the term "Church" in reference to the institutional patriarchal Orthodox Church in Russia. In contrast, "church" will be used to refer to individual patriarchal Orthodox churches, Orthodox schismatic groups, and non-Orthodox Christians of other denominational backgrounds. Additionally, it is important to clarify the calendar that will be used. Historically, Russia and the Orthodox Church have utilized the Old-Style Julian calendar, but the Soviet government switched to the Gregorian calendar in

1918. In order to avoid confusion and accommodate the Western reader, I have chosen to use the Gregorian system whenever possible. If the Julian date proves to be necessary, it will either be explicitly stated, or it will be included in parentheses after the Gregorian date.

Chapter 1: An Institutional Church

The Eastern Orthodox Church has a very long history in Russia and has had an enormous impact on the nation's religious and cultural identity. Its role of being the State Church under the Czars was instrumental in securing its influence, and the Church acquired its greatest power during the reign of the Romanov dynasty which lasted from 1613 until 1917. However, the reign of Nicholas II (1894–1917) revealed several major problems with the Orthodox Church as well as the Russian government. This chapter will examine the socio-economic, political, and religious conditions in Russia during this time and how the Orthodox Church handled its position of being the State Church under the increasingly unpopular Romanov dynasty.

A Brief History of the Church in Russia between 988–1894

Beginning officially in 988, Prince Vladimir of the Kievan Rus⁸ made Christianity the state religion of the kingdom and, being located near the still-powerful Byzantine Empire, this led to a powerful Orthodox influence in the country.⁹ Similar to its Byzantine counterpart, the new Russian Orthodox Church was centered on its patriarchs (bishops), and its ecumenical leadership was initially based in Kiev, but it frequently relocated wherever the political

⁸ The Kievan Rus was a medieval Slavic state located in modern Belarus and Ukraine. This state later became the nation of Russia in the 16th century. Prince Vladimir's grandmother, Saint Olga (later renamed *Elena*) of Kiev, had been extremely influential in bringing Christianity to the Rus and Vladimir completed the Christianization of the kingdom. See Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 22–23.

⁹ Wallace L. Daniel, *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia, 1st Edition*. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2006), p. 10.

leadership resided. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 caused the Russian Church, now based in Moscow, to become the primary Eastern Orthodox church in Europe. Additionally, this gave the Russian Czars the ability to proclaim themselves as the legitimate heirs of the Roman Empire and therefore the duty to protect Christianity and Christian values.¹⁰ This was initially confined to the territory of Russia but was also used to justify foreign intervention as well. This perceived calling and vision eventually had many far-reaching consequences.

The reign of Peter the Great (1682–1725) led to many changes in the structure of the Church. As part of his attempt to “Westernize” Russia, he abolished the Patriarchate in 1721 and replaced it with a new body called the Holy Synod.¹¹ Thus, the Church became a core pillar of the modernized Russian state.¹² This Synod was led by the Chief Procurator and consisted of a number of bishops, all of which were appointed by the Czar. Although the Church retained a degree of independence, it was quite limited as all ecclesiastical leaders were required to obey the Holy Synod, and by extension, those who had to maintain favour with the Czar if they wished to preserve their position.¹³ Peter the Great also was responsible for the increased centralization of the Russian government and the power of the Czar was greatly increased as a result of this move. The growing power of the autocracy had a major impact on the Orthodox Church, especially in the coming centuries.

Owing to this history and Peter the Great’s changes, Orthodoxy became so closely connected with Russian identity that it became assumed generally assumed that to be Russian was to be Orthodox. The Czars had begun a policy of “Russification,” which attempted to

¹⁰ Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II, Emperor of All the Russias*. (London: Pimlico, 1994), pp. 2–3.

¹¹ Francis House, *Millennium of Faith: Christianity in Russia, Ad 988–1988*. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), pp. 24–25.

¹² The new Russia was described with the slogan “Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Patriotism” (“Patriotism” was occasionally exchanged for “Nationality”). These “pillars” were highly influential in the development of both the Czarist and Soviet States, but in very different ways (*Ibid*, 24–25).

¹³ Daniel, *Orthodox Church and Civil Society*, pp. 17–18.

assimilate the numerous minority populations of the Empire into Russian culture, and thus by extension, the Orthodox faith.¹⁴ The Church was able to claim to be the only legitimate form of Christianity within Russia and this hegemony led to the suppression of many other Christian groups. Lutherans, Mennonites, Baptists, Roman Catholics, and Old Believers especially, were persecuted in varying severity over the years and were heavily pressured into joining the state church.¹⁵ During the reign of Czars Alexander II (1855–1881) and Alexander III (1881–1894), Chief Procurator Konstantin Pobedonostsev continued the national policy of persecuting these groups and considered them to be heretics who had deviated from the true Orthodox faith.¹⁶ In fact, the non-Orthodox Christian's position was worse than the non-Christian groups in the nation, such as the Muslims and the Buddhists residing in its Asian territories. Adherents of these religions were considered to be peculiar and in need of evangelization. Missionaries were sent to them, whereas the other Christians were accused of engaging in blasphemous behavior against both the Church and the State. This persecution, combined with the practice of automatically registering newborns as Orthodox Christians, resulted in the nation being ninety-five percent Orthodox by the twentieth century.¹⁷

However, the Church also paid a heavy price in becoming established officially. Peter the Great's reforms had cost the Church a significant amount of its independence since most of the Church's land was seized by Peter and his successors.¹⁸ Although much of this loss was offset by the money the Church received from the government, this meant that the Church no longer had its own source of income and was dependent on the graces of the State. The most important

¹⁴ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 4th Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 394.

¹⁵ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁶ Edward Crankshaw, *The Shadow of the Winter Palace, Russia's Drift To Revolution 1825-1917*. (New York, N.Y.: The Viking Press, 1976), pp. 281–282.

¹⁷ Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union*, pp. 30–31.

¹⁸ House, *Millennium of Faith*, pp. 24–26.

consequence of being connected to the State was that the Church was also automatically associated with the State, whether that be positive or negative. Thus, the position of the Church was closely connected to the position of the Czar and if the Czar's position and power were challenged, so too would the Church's. This reality caused great concern for many Church leaders, especially as the Russian government gained a reputation for being corrupt and out-of-touch with the population, especially during the reign of Nicholas II.¹⁹

Conditions in Russia Under Czar Nicholas II

Upon his coronation as Emperor of Russia on November 1, 1894, Czar Nicholas II of the Romanov dynasty inherited a nation that was growing increasingly unstable. His grandfather, Alexander II, had begun to introduce some reforms to the nation. These included measures that planned to create a limited representative body, as well as relieve the growing financial pressure on the peasant population.²⁰ However, he had been assassinated by revolutionaries in 1881 and this caused his successor, Alexander III (Nicholas II's father) to reverse the reforms.²¹ These decisions had been made on the advice of Chief Procurator Konstantin Pobedonostsev due to fears that further reforms could lead to more anarchy.²² Many of Alexander II's reformist ministers were fired, and the country moved towards autocracy and centralization again.

The situation was made worse by famine. Beginning in 1891, a severe drought swept through the nation and the already destitute peasants were quickly reduced to starvation. Cholera

¹⁹ Such sentiment became prevalent after Father Gapon's disastrous march on the Winter Palace in January 1905.

²⁰ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 40–41.

²¹ Czar Alexander II had been responsible for many reforms throughout Russia, such as the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. He had also begun to lay the groundwork for a Russian constitution in the last years of his life. However, the proposed reforms did not go far enough in the eyes of various anarchic groups that sought the downfall of the autocracy. One such group, the *People's Will*, assassinated Alexander II on March 13th, 1881. (Crankshaw, *Shadow of the Winter Palace*, pp. 264–270).

²² Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 41–42.

and typhus quickly followed, and by the end of the famine in the fall of 1892 half a million people had died.²³ Meanwhile, the government's response had been well-intentioned but disastrous; The bureaucracy proved to be slow and disorganized in offering effective aid, and many financial policies were slow to change in the face of the famine.²⁴ For instance, grain exports continued even though a significant portion of the population was starving.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, this caused many to view the government as callous and inept. However, the government recognized its failures and allowed the creation of volunteer organizations in November 1891. Famous individuals such as Prince Georgy Lvov, playwright Anton Chekhov, and writer Leo Tolstoy opened soup kitchens for the people.²⁶ While this mitigated the effects of the famine, it also caused many people to criticize the establishment and the institutions connected to it. The Church, which later excommunicated Tolstoy in 1901 for rejecting its teaching and authority, had attempted to curtail his relief campaign and this reinforced the image that it had grown corrupt and out of touch with the population and God's calling.²⁷ The centrist and liberal segments of the population had also grown more accepting of the organizations that had contributed to the relief effort, and many of these organizations had been drifting towards Marxism. The famine, although relatively short, had given shape to anti-traditional forces and had also exposed chronic weaknesses and errors within the Czarist system.

The famine also accelerated the growing trend of urbanization within Russian society. Many peasants drifted to the cities, looking for work and relief. They typically worked

²³ Ibid, p. 157.

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 157–158.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 157–158.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 159–160.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 160. The main teaching that Tolstoy rejected was the Divinity of Christ, as he believed referring to Jesus as God was blasphemous (A.N. Wilson, *Tolstoy*. [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988], pp. 465). It is also important to note that the excommunication did not have a major effect on Tolstoy as he had ceased to consider himself to be Orthodox nearly twenty years before (Ibid, p. 460).

seasonally in the cities, and then returned to their villages during harvest time.²⁸ Unfortunately, the cities were in a similar condition. Although Russia had finally begun to undergo industrialization in the 1880s, it was quite far behind in comparison to the West and had to undergo a similar transition. Strikes, although officially banned, were common and usually resulted in severe repression. The small but slowly growing middle class had become sympathetic to the plight of the peasants, and this new class was beginning to organize its opposition to the imperial government. One new organization was the Social Democratic party which was established in 1898.²⁹ This party was created by unifying the plethora of small Marxist groups that had sprung up throughout the country, and the continuing crisis drove many people into its ranks, or at least caused many to sympathize with the new movement. Most of its leaders were quickly arrested or exiled, but in 1903 many of these leaders reconvened in Brussels and London.³⁰ Here, the party split into two main groups: the Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks and the smaller but more moderate Mensheviks. Although the leaders were in exile, Marxist influence continued to grow in Russia.

The State of the Russian Orthodox Church

During these events, the Russian Orthodox Church continued to operate in the way that it had for the preceding centuries. Although it was not a mere puppet of the government, it was very closely connected to it. Priests and bishops continued to report to the Holy Synod, whose Chief Procurator was still appointed by the Czar. Many cathedrals and parish churches were funded by the government, as well as sponsoring missionary activity throughout the country,

²⁸ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, p. 431.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 405–406.

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 405–406.

especially in Central Asia and Siberia.³¹ The Church continued to be used as a source of national unity by the state, but the Church was clearly failing at this task.³² Although Chief Procurator Pobedonostsev certainly did not help the situation by clinging to the increasingly unpopular autocracy, the blame cannot be laid entirely on him or the Church. Most of the anti-government sentiment had little to do with the Church itself, but since the Church was so closely connected with the government it was frequently attacked alongside the state. Additionally, Russification and the prohibition on overt proselytizing on other faiths and Christian denominations had caused such minority groups to sympathize with the growing liberal middle class. This made it extremely difficult for any prospective Church reformer to gather support, especially as the ecclesiastical structure was deprived of any real authority to act on its own. While it is difficult to get a full picture of the state of the Church on the ground, especially in rural Russia, it is clear the Church and the clergy were very overstretched, especially as a result of urbanization.³³

Under Nicholas the clergy continued to perform their traditional roles in Russian society. Most of the parishes were located in the countryside and the villages, and the priest's duties usually reflected their needs. Most of their religious roles involved administering the Divine Liturgy and the Sacraments. Unfortunately, the clergy were usually poorly educated and frequently charged money for their services.³⁴ This extortion extended also to those who were sick, and therefore the average priest had become the object of scornful mockery and had acquired a reputation of being lazy.³⁵ While certainly there were many well-intentioned and honourable priests, they were hamstrung by their lack of authority and independence.³⁶ For

³¹ House, *Millennium of Faith*, p. 25.

³² Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, pp. 391–392.

³³ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 64–65.

³⁴ House, *Millennium of Faith*, pp. 33–34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

instance, all Church publications had to be reviewed by the state before being released, and this frequently resulted in the priests being unable to preach. The priests in the towns and urban areas were usually better trained, but the lack of any real authority ensured that their voices were ineffective, especially against the growing secular and Marxist influences.³⁷ The lack of authority extended all the way to the top of the ecclesiastical ladder as well. Bishops could rarely meet with one another, and this caused many of them to focus on their own diocese without much regard for the Church as a whole.³⁸ While the lack of movement was partially due to Russia's vast expanse, bishops were also frequently moved as a precaution against them gaining too much independence. All together, these issues greatly reduced greatly the ability of the Church to offer a unified position against those who were beginning to challenge its position and legitimacy.

The clergy, especially parish priests, also were distracted with a plethora of administrative tasks and this significantly reduced their ability to provide for the spiritual needs of their parishioners. Since the Church was usually the only effective means of establishing control over Russia's vast territory, priests were expected to perform civil tasks such as issuing birth, marriage, and death certificates.³⁹ The Church was also responsible for education in the countryside, but the low education levels of most priests rendered this largely ineffective. However, this education policy was pursued by both the Church and the state because Church schools were considered to be loyal and politically reliable.⁴⁰ Priests also constituted a type of secret police, as they were expected to report any behaviour that hinted at anti-Czarist intentions or sympathy.⁴¹ This information could even be extracted from the confessional booth, and thus

³⁷ Ibid, p. 34.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 34–35.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 44–45.

⁴⁰ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, p. 437.

⁴¹ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 355.

many people came to distrust their local priests. Finally, priests were also expected to serve as chaplains to the army. They had similar religious roles as ordinary priests and even frequently participated in battles, especially during the First World War.⁴²

Opposition to the status quo was beginning to grow within the Church as well. One of the most notable critics was the writer Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy had been born into the Russian Orthodox Church but he offered scathing criticisms of it in many of his writings. He can best be described an anarchist pacifist as he opposed the state and Church structure, yet he also rejected the terrorist methods, such as assassination, that other radical groups had begun to embrace in their opposition to the establishment. Instead, he preferred to express his discontentment through his writings.⁴³ He heavily criticized the Russification process and how the Church aided the policy. He referred to the Church's behaviour as a "spiritual despotism" that had lost sight of what it truly meant to be a follower of Christ.⁴⁴ To proclaim itself to be the only legitimate Church of Christ was tantamount to blasphemy in his view.⁴⁵ Rather than focus on state powers, the Church ought to focus on improving the deplorable social conditions of the nation and rid itself of exorbitant wealth while also embracing a simple lifestyle.⁴⁶ He also believed that the average peasant had a closer connection to God and a more realistic conception of Him.⁴⁷ Although his writings were clearly seen as being subversive, the heavily censored state press did allow them to be published. It is also notable that Tolstoy frequently attacked Pobedonostsev,

⁴² Ibid, pp. 358–359.

⁴³ Tolstoy's most important writings in this regard include, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Constance Garnett, trans. (Auckland, NZ: Floating Press, 2009); *What I Believe*, Constantine Popoff, trans. (London: Elliot Stock, 1885); *Resurrection*, Louise Maude, trans. (London: Wordsworth, 2014); *A Confession* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1998).

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Tolstoy*, pp. 420–421.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 421.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 360–365.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 433.

even calling him a hypocrite and a blasphemer, yet Pobedonostsev still allowed his writings to be distributed throughout the nation.⁴⁸ He even recognized that Tolstoy was not entirely wrong in his assessment of the Church as there was little the Church could be proud of.⁴⁹ However, Tolstoy's vicious attacks on the Church had to be answered, preferably in a way that could avoid causing more discontentment, and this led to his excommunication in 1901. He had also advocated for granting clemency to violent anarchists and this had greatly angered the Church.⁵⁰

Despite his excommunication, Tolstoy's work remained extremely influential. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the middle class and many peasants were familiar with Tolstoy's philosophy and this contributed to the rising anti-clericalism in the countryside.⁵¹ This situation remained the case despite many of his more vocal supporters being exiled.⁵² In particular, Tolstoy's view that the peasants and the common people were in possession of the true faith found support in all quarters of Russian society. Even Empress Alexandra, despite her strong autocratic tendencies, held some sympathy for this position.⁵³ The perceived innocence of the peasant, especially in the aftermath of the 1891 famine, stood in great contrast to the rigid structure of the Church. This may seem strange to a Western reader, especially one who attends a traditional and liturgical church, but it is important to note that the Eastern Orthodox Church had always placed a heavy emphasis on the individual experience of the Divine. Although Eastern Christianity maintains a high view of liturgy and church doctrine, it is personal experience that is

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 458.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 459.

⁵⁰ Crankshaw, *Shadow of the Winter Palace*, pp. 273.

⁵¹ Heather J. Coleman, *Orthodox Christianity in Imperial Russia: A Source Book on Lived Religion*. (Upcc Book Collections on Project Muse, Global Cultural Studies. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 213–214.

⁵² Wilson, *Tolstoy*, pp. 419–420.

⁵³ Lieven, *Nicholas II*, pp. 163–166.

held as the primary method in which a believer draws near to God.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that Tolstoy's work was not rejected outright, and even was partially accepted, by those who were normally staunch opponents of ideas that could challenge the established order. While there was some sympathy, the Church's hierarchy, especially Pobedonostsev, were determined to defend the other essential pillar of Orthodox theology; which held that the Church and its traditions were essential for providing the boundaries within which this personal experience could take place. The Church is also the image of God in the world, and therefore attacks against it constitute an assault on God.⁵⁵ Tolstoy's writing revealed a growing schism within Russia as to where the Church's focuses and priorities should lie, especially in regard to what it meant to represent the image of God.

Peasant Life in Russia

The reality of peasant life was, however, far different than what was portrayed by Tolstoy and other idealists. Peasants accounted for approximately three-quarters of Russia's population (estimated at 125 million in the 1897 census), but their living conditions were extremely poor.⁵⁶ Czar Alexander II had granted the serf (now peasant) population emancipation and the right to own land in 1861, but the results of this declaration were disappointing as many peasants continued to languish in extreme poverty.⁵⁷ There were several other problems facing the peasant population. Most notably, they were significantly lacking in public morality. It was a common sight, for example, to see people naked and sexual acts being committed in public.⁵⁸ Their sense

⁵⁴ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1957), pp. 36–39.

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 176–177.

⁵⁶ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, pp. 430–431.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 430.

⁵⁸ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 94–95.

of justice was also extremely perverted. There was little sense of a “fair trial” and most alleged as well as actual criminals suffered a torturous death for their crimes, such as having their eyes gouged out or being hacked to death with sickles.⁵⁹ Violence was frequently used to resolve arguments, as village and family disputes were often accompanied by severe beatings. One notable distinction between the peasants and the rest of the country was the general lack of a conception of private property.⁶⁰ Although there was some private ownership, the majority of a household’s goods were considered to be the village’s property under the jurisdiction of the local commune. Marxism had not yet reached rural Russia, but peasant values were already partially aligned with later communist ideology.⁶¹ Additionally, stealing from another peasant was to be severely punished, but stealing from the government or landowners was considered to be acceptable, and even in some cases heroic.⁶² Unfortunately these attitudes significantly harmed the peasants. When the government began to introduce measures that gave them greater autonomy in 1905, these were opposed because it was considered noble to oppose the state, even if the state was attempting to help them.

The peasant population practiced a wide variety of faiths and engaged in various religious practices. They were nominally Orthodox and considered themselves to be so, but paganism and shamanism were also practiced and venerated alongside their alleged Orthodox faith.⁶³ Alchemy and magic were considered to be an acceptable method of healing people, alongside prayer and the Church’s Sacraments. Church priests had a varied reception from the peasants in rural Russia. It is generally recognized that the Church’s priests were hated by the common people and

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 95–98.

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 99–100.

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 99–101.

⁶² Ibid, pp. 100–101.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 67.

although there is much truth to this position, it does not account for the whole of the peasant population.⁶⁴ Women were usually more religious than men, and the elderly were usually extremely devout and held great respect for their priests, but the attitude became more sour as the younger generations came to dominate the demographic landscape.⁶⁵ The youth were far more likely to reject the Church's authority and live an immoral lifestyle, especially those who worked in factories.⁶⁶ Far more important to the peasants was the *starets* or “wandering holy men.” These individuals were usually Orthodox men that had rejected the formality of Church structure and liturgy in favour of personal experience.⁶⁷ Many of them also mixed their Russian Orthodox faith with other tribal and local religions. Although strange, these men were seen to be in possession of great wisdom, and were frequently asked for council, both by commoners and rulers. These were the men that Tolstoy had thought of as embodying the ideal Christian, as they rejected both material wealth and societal influences, especially from the state Church. The rejection of the official Orthodox Church in favour of these men by much of the nominally faithful population was a grim sign for the future as the Russian Orthodox Church would likely find itself short of support from the rural population.⁶⁸

Rising Dissent

The growing tensions in Russia reached a boiling point during the Decembrist Revolution in 1905 and the trigger for this event was “Bloody Sunday”. By 1905, Czar Nicholas still had a large degree of popular support and commanded the respect of much of the Russian population.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Leiven, *Nicholas II*, p. 189.

⁶⁵ Coleman, *Orthodox Christianity*, pp. 214–215.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 212–213.

⁶⁷ Wallace, *Orthodox Church and Civil Society*, pp. 22–23.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁹ Edvard Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar, The Life and Death of Nicholas II*. (New York, N.Y.: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1993), pp. 74–75.

On January 22 (January 9), an Orthodox priest named Georgy Gapon lead a crowd of factory workers to the outskirts of the Winter Palace in order to petition the Czar to initiate worker reforms.⁷⁰ He had taken precautions to ensure that his march was peaceful, and the police were aware of his intentions since he was a secret informer for the State.⁷¹ However, Nicholas had left the palace just before the march, and the demonstrators were met with armed resistance. The resulting confrontation led to several thousand being killed or wounded, and many more were arrested. This caused Gapon to turn against the Czar, referring to him as a murderer, and he became one of the first priests to embrace the revolutionary cause.⁷² Although Nicholas had almost no involvement in the massacre, this event proved to be the end of his popular support and he never recovered his image as being the caring “father of the people.” Violence soon broke out throughout the country, as landowner’s houses were burned down and priests were attacked.⁷³ Peasant communes were created in their place and they began to openly defy the government. They redistributed the property they stole from the landowners amongst themselves, took over Church schools, created their own constitutions, and refused to pay taxes and provide army recruits.⁷⁴ The Black Sea Fleet also experienced major mutinies and ethnic minorities staged many revolts, particularly within Poland, the Baltic states, and Finland.⁷⁵ Each of these was suppressed, but it took a tremendous military effort to do so.⁷⁶ It was now clear that the Russian Empire could not survive much longer unless major changes were implemented.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 74–75.

⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 74–75.

⁷² Ibid, pp. 75–76.

⁷³ Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, pp. 182–183.

⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 182–184.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 184–186.

⁷⁶ Russia also suffered a major defeat at the hands of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). The Russian navy had been annihilated at the battle of the Tsushima Straight and this defeat further tarnished Nicholas’s reputation and questioned his ability to lead the country. (Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, pp. 402–403).

In an effort to strengthen his regime and restabilize the country, Nicholas began to offer some reforms but they failed to have any lasting effect. He attempted to grant the peasants more land autonomy, but it was mostly ignored.⁷⁷ Local councils, called *zemstvos*, were also granted more power. Nicholas also created a national legislative and representative body called the “Duma”. However, its power was quite limited and therefore it was incapable of offering any real change to quell the rising discontent.⁷⁸ Nicholas continued to cling to his autocratic powers and control over the Church, curtailing any positive changes his reforms might have achieved. At this time, the Holy Synod and the Church hierarchy still supported Nicholas and was ready to defend his absolute authority in all spheres of government. The Church’s power also was still protected as it was mostly immune from the Duma’s jurisdiction.⁷⁹

However, dissent in the Church also had reached a critical point and there was a plethora of complaints from all ranks of the clergy. Pobedonostsev now was very old and unable to exert the influence he once held, and many bishops and priests used this situation as an opportunity to push for ecclesiastical and political reform.⁸⁰ One of the most important figures in this movement was the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg, Anthony Vadkovsky. He advocated that the restrictions against minority Christian groups be lifted and that the Church regain its independence by reinstating the Patriarchate that had been abolished by Peter the Great almost two-hundred years earlier.⁸¹ Now, the consensus within the Church had become that the Church needed to regain its independence from the state if it hoped to combat the issues in the country.⁸² This resurgence finally allowed the Church to remove the burden that Russification and other unpopular policies

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 414–415.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 409–410.

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp. 408–409.

⁸⁰ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 356. Pobedonostsev stepped down as Chief-Procurator in October 1905 and he died two years later.

⁸¹ House, *Millennium of Faith*, pp. 36–37.

⁸² Ibid, p. 38.

had imposed on it and improve its standing with the minority populations of the Empire. Nicholas wavered though, and postponed meetings as long as he could. The Holy Synod continued to hold authority over the Church, but its support had almost vanished. During this council, one major change was implemented: in 1905 Christian minorities were given religious freedom through a tolerance edict. Although this change ended years of persecution and did not threaten Orthodox supremacy, the damage caused by the previous policy of oppression had left its scars.⁸³ Additionally, nothing was said at the time about forming an official Church policy to help the downtrodden of society.

Although there were reforms being formulated and slowly implemented, the emergence and controversy of Grigori Rasputin further discredited the Church, as well as the royal family. Rasputin was a wandering Orthodox and pagan mystic, who was said to have extraordinary healing powers. This caught the attention of the royal family as the heir to the throne, Tsarevich Alexis, was afflicted with hemophilia and occasionally poor health. Rasputin was introduced to Nicholas and Alexandra in 1905 and quickly earned their favour, especially Alexandra's. To her, he was the fulfillment of the ideal *starets* or “holy man” who lived on personal faith, not rigid Church doctrines.⁸⁴ He certainly had some miraculous healing powers, even if he was not physically present. For instance, one night in 1912, court doctors had informed the royal family that Alexis was about to die, but Rasputin telegraphed the Empress that the boy would survive and, amazingly, he recovered almost immediately after.⁸⁵ This cemented his position with the court, even though he was despised by many of them for his licentious and abusive behavior.⁸⁶

⁸³ Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union*, p. 26.

⁸⁴ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 30–31.

⁸⁵ Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar*, p. 106.

⁸⁶ Rasputin had a reputation for accepting bribes, humiliating members of the court in extremely derogatory fashion, seducing court ladies, was frequently found in the company of prostitutes (Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 31–33).

Nicholas did not approve of the man's actions, but he believed Rasputin was a very religious individual who was capable of easing his son's pain.⁸⁷ Rasputin was particularly hated by the Church, as he had gained tremendous influence within it and was immune to criticism because of his connections with the royal family. The Rasputin affair bolstered the cause of those who sought to rid the Church of state control.⁸⁸ Although Rasputin was assassinated by members of the court in December of 1916, he had so tarnished the image of the Church that it was even more despised by the population, despite its attempts to reform.⁸⁹

World War I proved to be the breaking point for the imperial government and the Romanov Dynasty. The Russian Church supported the government wholeheartedly and cooperated with the war effort by encouraging parishioners to donate to the cause of victory. Orthodox priests continued to work with the army and the navy, and supported medical staff in military hospitals.⁹⁰ However, the war went very badly for the Russian Empire. With the exception of the Brusilov Offensive in 1916, the Russian Empire had few victories and the war was characterized by repetitive and heavy defeats. Casualties were enormous, and it is estimated that anywhere between 7.3 and 8.5 million Russian soldiers were killed or wounded during the conflict.⁹¹ Shortages and strikes became even more common and many people wanted an end to the war. This led to the first of two revolutions that Russia experienced in 1917, where the first

⁸⁷ Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar*, p. 107.

⁸⁸ Lieven, *Nicholas II*, pp. 168–169.

⁸⁹ The majority of the Russian population was aware of Rasputin's reputation. They learned through a variety of sources, and anti-Czarist forces in particular were keen to ensure that the public was aware of what was occurring. Many of these stories were embellished, and several were blatantly untrue (such as allegations that he was having an affair with Empress Alexandra), but they were successful in further discrediting the royal family. The Church was affected by this as well due to its close connection to the monarchy. Additionally, the Chief-Procurator, Vladimir Sabler, was an ally of Rasputin and this connection resulted in the Church being perceived as being pro-Rasputin even though the majority of the clergy despised him (Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 33–34).

⁹⁰ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 359.

⁹¹ Arch J. Getty, and Oleg V Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939*. (Annals of Communism. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 1–2. Most sources place the number of soldiers killed at 1.8 million with the balance accounting for the wounded.

saw the collapse of the monarchy and the establishment of a short-lived democratic government, which was soon swept away by the Bolsheviks in the second revolution later that year.

Summary

Due to its close connections to an increasingly unpopular government that was beset with incompetence and scandal, the Orthodox Church was perceived by many Russian peasants and workers to be a parasitic institution that kept them in a state of near servitude to the Czar. While there is a degree of truth to these accusations, it fails to present an accurate picture of the Church or the average Russian subject. There were many clergy that opposed the situation that the Church found itself in, but they were powerless to bring about any major changes due to the State control of the Holy Synod. Many peasants also supported the Church and viewed it to be an integral part of their lives. Russia was growing increasingly unstable, and the future was very grim for the Romanov dynasty, as democratic and communist forces were becoming increasingly emboldened by the deteriorating influence of the monarchical government. 1917 was to be a year of tremendous change for both the Russian nation and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Church entered this year with many enemies, but also many supporters.

Chapter 2: The Bolshevik Assault

The collapse of the Czarist government in Russia in 1917 initiated a period of transition for the Russian Orthodox Church. Previously wielding significant power and influence, the Church now had to contend with new governments, which were not willing to continue granting the Church the privileges to which it had grown accustomed. This did, however, present the Church with the opportunity to finally break free from the direct control of the State. This chapter will cover the years of 1917–1924, and survey how the Orthodox Church handled the transition from being the State Church of Imperial Russia, to being faced with heavy persecution and infiltration from Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks and their allies.

The Provisional Government and Church Reforms

Due to serious military setbacks, a collapsing economy, and rising food prices, Russia experienced a variety of changes in government in 1917. The first revolution was known as the “February Revolution” and occurred on March 12 (February 27) when Prince Georgy Lvov and Alexander Kerensky proclaimed the establishment of the Provisional Government.⁹² The Provisional Government was Russia’s first democratic government and its rise to power was unopposed. Rather than attempt to preserve his position as the Czar, Nicholas II chose to abdicate on March 16 (March 3) and the fall of the monarchy was greeted with great joy and

⁹² Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia. 1891-1991, A History*. (Picador, NY: A Metropolitan Book, Henry Holt and Company, 2015), pp. 72–73.

celebration throughout Russia. Nicholas had lost nearly all of his popular support and even the most loyal institutions of the State, the army and the Church, did not attempt to defend his position as Russia's rightful ruler.⁹³ In a remarkable contrast to their response to the 1905 Revolution, the Church published an encyclical calling on the Russian people to support the new democratic government only three days after his abdication.⁹⁴ The Provisional Government was heavily influenced by the French Revolution, and Kerensky's first acts were to begin instituting several egalitarian reforms throughout Russia. These included the right to free speech, freedom of assembly and the press, freedom of religion, and a lifting of legal restrictions on race and gender.⁹⁵ At this time, the Bolsheviks only possessed a minor amount of influence, and supported these changes. Lenin, in fact, endorsed these reforms and commented that they made Russia "the freest country in the world."⁹⁶ For the Church, the immediate result of these reforms was that it was no longer guaranteed the position of being the State religion. This potential reality received a mixed response by the clergy.

At the same time, the Church was also in the process of a major restructuring and reorganization. The Provisional Government appointed Vladimir Lvov the temporary procurator of the Holy Synod and, beginning in March 1917, several congresses were held in Moscow to determine the future of the Church.⁹⁷ The immediate priority was to determine how to free the Church from over two-centuries of State control and how the Church should function apart from it. Lvov began by purging the Church of bishops that had supported the Czarist system, and this created an opportunity for those who wanted to decentralize the Church.⁹⁸ To accomplish

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 75–76.

⁹⁴ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, pp. 363–364.

⁹⁵ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, p. 77–78.

⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 77–78.

⁹⁷ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, pp. 363–365.

⁹⁸ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, p. 26.

decentralization, local church councils were permitted to fill positions within their churches at their own discretion and by their own preferred means.⁹⁹ By July, many churches chose to utilize democratic methods to fill vacant positions and this allowed local church councils to limit the power of the bishops.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, it was decided that bishops were to be elected by diocesan congresses and that laymen within the churches were allowed to participate in church elections.¹⁰¹ In August, it was decided that the Holy Synod was to be abolished and the Patriarchate was re-established soon after this decision.¹⁰² These actions led to the first bishopric elections in Russian history, which occurred in Moscow and Petrograd.¹⁰³ The winner of the election in Moscow, Patriarch Tikhon,¹⁰⁴ became the unofficial leader of the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁰⁵ Tikhon was supportive of the changes in the structure and government of the Church and he continued to encourage the individual churches to become less dependent on the state and his own personal leadership. His primary goal was to preserve the unity of the Church, and this objective guided his decisions amidst the coming persecution.

While Tikhon preferred to remain as apolitical as possible, this was a minority position within the Church. Many clergy, laymen, and individual churches chose to quietly (and later overtly) support the traditional order, while other left-leaning groups sought to introduce their ideology into the Church. One such group was the “All-Russian Union of Democratic Orthodox

⁹⁹ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 363.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 363.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 364.

¹⁰² House, *Millennium of Faith*, pp. 40–42.

¹⁰³ Chaillot, *The Eastern Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 364.

¹⁰⁴ Patriarch Tikhon was later canonized by the Orthodox Church.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 364. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodoxy does not have an official leader who is declared to be the head of the Church. Instead, each bishop is responsible for their own diocese and they are forbidden to interfere in another bishop’s matters. However, the bishop of the most prestigious city in the country (usually the capital) is usually considered to be a “first among equals” and thus can carry significant influence outside of his personal diocese. Due to his election as Patriarch of Moscow, Tikhon was instrumental in guiding the Orthodox Church for the remainder of his life.

Clergy and Laymen” which was founded on March 6, 1917 (Julian).¹⁰⁶ This organization was composed mostly of socialist priests who, under the leadership of Alexander Boyarsky, Alexander Vvedensky, and Ioann Yegorov, sought to make the Church more appealing to the working class.¹⁰⁷ This group was only a small minority within the Church, but it had the support of the Provisional Government and Vladimir Lvov, and such support allowed it to take control of the Church’s press.¹⁰⁸ Coupled with Lvov’s purging of the traditionalist bishops, this allowed the movement’s socialist ideas to spread more easily within the Church. Despite this external support, many priests did not support them and some quietly commemorated Nicholas II long after his abdication.¹⁰⁹ Socialism was unable to penetrate the Church in 1917, but the idea of merging Christian and socialist ideals was not forgotten and would be utilized by the Bolsheviks in the future.

Although the Provisional Government was not strictly hostile to the Church, it did begin to erode its power, authority, and influence. The Church officially declared itself to be apolitical, but it clearly expected to retain its privileged position within society and retain its State subsidies. Unfortunately for the Church, the Provisional Government was unlikely to allow the status quo to continue. In anticipation of this, the Church called a general council on June 11 (Julian) to prepare the Church’s position and response.¹¹⁰ This council was called the “All-Russian Preparatory Conference of Clergy and Laity.” Although there were some clergy who pushed for a complete separation of Church and State, this was a minority position. Instead, it was decided that the Church would allow for religious freedom within Russia, but the Orthodox

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 364.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 364.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 363–365.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 364–365.

¹¹⁰ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, p. 26–27.

Church was to retain its dominant position within the country.¹¹¹ On July 13 (Julian), the Conference announced that it expected the Church's rights and privileges to be respected by the government. These rights included control over the nation's schools, compulsory religious education, and State recognition of Church holidays as well as marriage and divorce laws.¹¹²

As expected, the Provisional Government did not continue to extend these privileges to the Church, but it was able to partially maintain its dominant position. The main area of contention was over control of the education system. On July 20 (Julian), the Provisional Government issued a decree that placed all Church schools under state control.¹¹³ Additionally, it was becoming clear that the State was likely to cease providing subsidies to the Church.¹¹⁴ Military regulations were also changed. Russian soldiers were no longer required to attend religious services, and the percentage of troops who attended the services and received the sacraments dropped from nearly 100 percent to less than 10 percent.¹¹⁵ However, the Church was able to retain its status as the State Church and some of the powers that were associated with such a position. On August 5 (Julian), the Provisional Government abolished the Holy Synod and replaced it with the "Department for Religious Affairs". This action legalized all other religions, but the Church was able to dominate this department because the minister and the deputy minister both had to belong to the Orthodox Church.¹¹⁶ Despite this partial victory, the Church was still very concerned about its diminishing influence and this helped contribute to the restoration of an independent patriarchate, as well as rejecting the clergy who advocated openly for socialist ideals.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp. 26–27.

¹¹² Fletcher, *Russian Orthodox Church Underground*, pp. 17–18.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 18.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 18.

¹¹⁵ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 360.

¹¹⁶ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, p. 27.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 28–30.

While the Church was reorganizing and adapting to its changing position, the political situation in Russia was spiralling into chaos. Peasants, workers, and soldiers were growing increasing discontented with the Provisional Government's inability to bring peace and restore the economy. These groups had begun to form special organizations to voice their grievances, and quickly became breeding grounds for Bolshevik propaganda and agitation.¹¹⁸ Nationalism was also rising in the non-Russian provinces of the Empire, particularly within Finland and the Ukraine. In order to preserve its claim of being the legitimate government of Russia, the Provisional Government, with Bolshevik support, opposed these independence movements but it did allow for greater autonomy within the Empire.¹¹⁹ The unpopularity of the Provisional Government was rising among almost all sections of society and this coincided with the growing popularity of the Bolsheviks. Lenin had been sent to Petrograd by the Germans who hoped that he would be able to cause discontentment within Russia and thus undermine the Russian war effort. Accomplishing this task was relatively easy, as the Bolsheviks opposed the war, while the Provisional Government sought to maintain its commitments to the Allies and remain in the conflict.¹²⁰

At the request of the Allies and as part of a plan to restore national patriotism, the Provisional Government launched an offensive against the Central Powers in the summer of 1917.¹²¹ This offensive, known as the Kerensky Offensive, was a complete disaster and, instead of restoring morale, proved to be the end of the Russian army. The army began to disintegrate through desertion and many soldiers refused to continue fighting.¹²² Making matters worse,

¹¹⁸ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 79–81.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 81.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 84.

¹²¹ By this time, it was widely believed that the Romanov's had been German sympathizers. Thus, it was feared that if the Central Powers won the war, the Germans would place the Romanov family back on the throne (Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, p. 84).

¹²² Ibid, pp. 84–85.

Kerensky and General Kornilov attempted to subvert the growing power and popularity of the Bolsheviks by establishing a military dictatorship in early September (late August). This event, known as the Kornilov Affair, failed and it destroyed the remaining popularity and integrity of the Provisional Government.¹²³ This disruption created a window of opportunity for the Bolsheviks and Lenin was quick to seize it. Utilizing their high popularity among the urban soldiers and workers, the Bolsheviks were able to stage a successful coup, known as the “October Revolution,” and captured Moscow and Petrograd on November 7 (October 25).¹²⁴ This event initiated the era of communism within Russia, as well as the Russian Civil War.¹²⁵

The Ideology of Marxism

As Marxists, the Bolsheviks were ideologically against religion and their strategy for uprooting religion ultimately flowed from Marxist thought. Marxism denies the existence of the Divine reality, and thus there are no human needs that can only be filled with religion.¹²⁶ Since religion was considered to be useless, except as a means of social control, Marxist ideology taught that it was merely a means of coping with a lack of material possessions and as a way of interpreting natural phenomena that was otherwise unexplainable. As Karl Marx famously stated, “religion... is the opiate of the people”¹²⁷; material possessions and science would eventually

¹²³ Ibid, pp. 84–85.

¹²⁴ Ibid, pp. 92–97.

¹²⁵ The Russian Civil War was fought primarily from 1918–1921, although some groups continued to fight against the Bolsheviks until 1923. Russia was divided into two major factions and several sub-factions. Most of the fighting occurred between the “Red” Bolshevik forces which controlled the Russian heartland along with its major cities and the “White” forces which controlled the Far East and the Caucasus. In addition, there were several “Green” armies of bandits that frequently switched sides. Finally, many non-Russian territories of the Empire, such as Finland, the Baltic States, Poland, and Ukraine, took this opportunity to declare themselves as independent nations. These nations frequently found themselves on the “White” side as the Bolsheviks made numerous and mostly unsuccessful attempts to reconquer these nations.

¹²⁶ Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, pp. 46–47.

¹²⁷ This quote can be found in Marx’s *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, Annette Jolin and Joseph O’Malley, trans. (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

lead to the extinction of religion and this was inevitable result of human progress.¹²⁸ However, the speed at which this could be accomplished was the subject of much debate. Marx held a deep-seated hatred for Christianity and the traditional political, moral, and philosophical ideas that it had created. This led him to embrace a “destructionist” approach to dealing with religion where it was to be swiftly and decisively crushed using any means available.¹²⁹ In contrast, his colleague Friedrich Engels held a much more realistic understanding of the “problem of religion.” In his view, religion, especially Christianity, was too deeply rooted in the minds and culture of the people, and therefore a cultural subversion needed to take place in order to sever the people from their religious heritage.¹³⁰ Religion was to be slowly replaced by science and material goods, and over the course of several generations religion would slowly die out.¹³¹

The Bolshevik leadership was also split when faced with the question on how to destroy the Church within Russia. Leon Trotsky, Lenin’s second in command and leader of the Red Army, held a particularly low view of the Church and its influence among the people. He believed that entertainment, largely provided by cinemas, could serve as an adequate replacement for the Church.¹³² He advocated for brutal measures to be carried out against the clergy, including the arrest and execution of Patriarch Tikhon, and that this action could quickly crush the leadership of the Church, resulting in the majority of their congregants to abandon the Church.¹³³ However, Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders held a far more accurate understanding of the position of the Church, even though they shared Trotsky’s intense hatred for Christianity. They realized that due to the Orthodox Church’s millennium old presence in Russia, religion was

¹²⁸ Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, pp. 46–47.

¹²⁹ Dimity Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*, pp. 13–14.

¹³⁰ Ibid, pp. 16–17.

¹³¹ Ibid, pp. 15–17.

¹³² Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*, pp. 32–33.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 32.

deeply entrenched in the minds of the people and that it was very difficult, if not impossible, task to completely dislodge it. Lenin also wanted to avoid creating martyrs through direct persecution because doing so only strengthened the Church's "cult of the saints" and encouraged believers in persevering in their faith.¹³⁴ Nikolai Bukharin, a high-ranking Bolshevik and editor of the Party newspaper *Pravda*, believed that although education and science reduced the influence of religion, a significant amount of time was necessary to accomplish this goal.¹³⁵ With the exception of Trotsky's extremely violent and bloody plan, the majority of Soviet leaders believed a strategy of attrition was the best approach as it could gradually cause the Church and religion to crumble while also reducing the risk of major opposition from the population.¹³⁶

The Bolsheviks failed to make any distinction between individual churches and "The Church" as an institution. In their view, the destruction of the individual churches removed the institutional Church's ability to maintain its influence among the people and resist further attacks.¹³⁷ Thus, the Bolshevik's main attack against the Church came in the form of an assault against individual churches, and this would cause the institutional Church to lose its ability to "control" the population.¹³⁸ At this time, there was little understanding of the fact that many individual churches were only loosely connected to the institutional Church, and in fact were quite independent. In hindsight, his tremendous oversight was instrumental in the eventual Bolshevik failure to suppress the Church.

Finally, the Bolsheviks faced one additional problem. Marx had assumed the revolution was to take place in a nation that was largely urban, industrialized, and had an already

¹³⁴ House, *Millennium of Faith*, p. 67.

¹³⁵ Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, p. 23.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹³⁷ Dominic Erdozain, *The Dangerous God: Christianity and the Soviet Experiment*, 1st Edition. (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017), p. 27.

¹³⁸ At this time, the Bolsheviks were not concerned with the non-Orthodox churches throughout Russia. This attitude later changed in 1928.

secularized workforce.¹³⁹ In contrast, Russia was mostly a rural and agrarian state. Although the urban workforce that Russia did have was already on the side of the Bolsheviks, it was very difficult to spread communism among the rural population due to a lack of reliable communications within the country.¹⁴⁰ Although the Church eventually struggled to maintain its identity and influence in the cities, the lack of direct communist control in the countryside allowed it to maintain its presence among the majority of the Russian population.

The Church's Response to the Bolsheviks

The Church met the Bolshevik seizure of power in the same manner of relative indifference with which it had greeted the Provisional Government. On December 2, the Church issued a statement declaring that it expected to remain the primary faith within Russia, its remaining privileges be respected, and that it remain fully independent and free from State influence.¹⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, this statement was ignored and it did not take long for the Bolsheviks to begin passing anti-Church legislation. On January 23, 1918 (Julian), the Bolsheviks passed the “Decree of Separation of Church from State, and of School from Church.” Articles 12 and 13 in particular decreed that the Church could no longer own property and that its current property was to fall under the ownership of the People and the supervision of state authorities.¹⁴² The immediate effect of this law was that the Church was now unable to raise its own revenue. This, combined with the Bolshevik unwillingness to subsidize the Church, marked a clear threat to the Church’s financial survival. A week later, the government also seized all

¹³⁹ Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 34.

¹⁴¹ Catriona Kelly, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularization and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988*. (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), pp. 23–24.

¹⁴² Erdozain, *The Dangerous God*, p. 18.

property owned by military chaplains and ceased supporting their services.¹⁴³ In July, the clergy were disenfranchised and were barred from owning land unless if none of their neighbours wanted or needed it.¹⁴⁴ All religious education was no longer funded, and it was stated that further restrictions on what could be taught were to be clarified at a later date.¹⁴⁵ This stipulation showed to many that the new Soviet government did not really understand the nature of the task that it had taken upon itself. American Rear Admiral Mark L. Bristol, for example, writing to the American Secretary of State, noted that the Bolsheviks had essentially copied that anti-religious legislation that French leftists had pushed for in 1905.¹⁴⁶ The laws in both France and the Soviet Union resulted in the government ending all subsidies to any religious organizations as well as the forced closure of thousands of religious schools.

This was not the only instance of confusion among the Bolshevik ranks. While it technically remained legal to disseminate religious material, accusations of engaging in “counter-revolutionary activity” made it increasingly difficult to continue to do so.¹⁴⁷ Such accusations were frequently arbitrary and made at the whim of local commissars as the Bolshevik leadership never specified what was to be considered “counter-revolutionary” activity. This situation led to actions such as the mass killing and torture of priests by the Red Army in the Don region in February of 1918.¹⁴⁸ Further confusion was added due to a series of contradictory orders. In December of 1918, a decree was issued that condemned the arbitrary closure of churches, yet in May 1919 orders were issued to seize relics and other property from the churches.¹⁴⁹ This lack of

¹⁴³ Ibid, pp. 18–19.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 19–20.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 18–19.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 20–21.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 19–20.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 21. In the first year of Bolshevik rule, twenty bishops and approximately four hundred priests, deacons, monks, and nuns were killed with hundreds more being imprisoned.

¹⁴⁹ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, p. 39.

consistency continued throughout the Leninist years. Even by July 1923, Soviet Commissars were still awaiting the promised instructions on how the problem of the churches should be handled and what constituted “counter-revolutionary” activity.¹⁵⁰

The initial response of the Church was initially heated but it quickly simmered in the face of rising persecution and massacres of the clergy. Just before the Decree of Separation, Patriarch Tikhon strongly condemned and excommunicated the Bolshevik leaders for their attempts to subvert the Church.¹⁵¹ He also condemned the mass killings of both clergy and laity, but he was careful to not call the Church to acts of armed resistance against the Soviet government. Instead, he called on both the clergy and the laity to continue supporting the institutional Church, and also to form their own organizations that allowed them to resist the encroaching influence of the Bolsheviks.¹⁵² This institutional resistance marked the official stance of the Church. It refused to engage in active resistance or subversion against the communists, but it sought to defend its declining position and exhort its members to resist the Bolshevik influence in their private spiritual lives. This position allowed the Church to officially remain neutral and apolitical, and thus avoid being accused of “counter-revolutionary” activity but still maintain its presence among those who remained faithful.

Despite being officially apolitical, the Church, especially Patriarch Tikhon, held significant influence among the Russian population. Although the excommunication of the Bolsheviks was irrelevant to their personal lives, it did make it much more difficult for the Bolsheviks to secure the loyalty of the still mostly religious Russian population.¹⁵³ The Patriarch had also continued to administer the Eucharist to the imprisoned Czar and his family and held

¹⁵⁰ Erdozain, *The Dangerous God*, pp. 19–20.

¹⁵¹ Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917–1970*, pp. 20–21.

¹⁵² Ibid, pp. 20–21.

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp. 21–22.

memorial services for them after their murder in March 1918.¹⁵⁴ These actions contributed to the impression in the minds of the people (and the Bolsheviks) that the Church was anti-communist. By autumn 1918, Tikhon was attempting to clarify further the Church's neutrality. He issued another proclamation that featured many of the same features as the one he had issued in January, but he added that the Bolshevik government had come into power by the will of God.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, the Russian people were obligated to submit to the government, as long as it did not contradict the laws of God. Although Tikhon was attempting to use his influence to avoid calling people to active resistance, the Bolsheviks continued to accuse him and the Church of attempting to subvert the State.

During the Civil War, the members of the Church also split into "White" and "Red" factions.¹⁵⁶ The Church was officially neutral during the war, and it refused to bless either side because the conflict was seen as a fratricidal war.¹⁵⁷ Both sides committed numerous atrocities, and this also contributed to the Church's decision to support neither side.¹⁵⁸ On September 25, 1919 (Julian), Tikhon ordered the clergy to abstain from political involvement on the grounds that the Soviets had separated Church and State.¹⁵⁹ This action confirmed the Church's neutrality and it allowed the clergy and the laity to support whichever side they preferred as long as it did not contradict their religious conscience.¹⁶⁰ There were a small number of priests that chose to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 21–22.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 22–23.

¹⁵⁶ The "Red" forces were those who supported the Bolshevik uprising. The "White" forces came from a variety of pro-monarchy and pro-republican forces that opposed communism. Thus, the Whites were constantly plagued by disunity as they did not share a common vision for the future of Russia. The White forces received foreign aid from Western nations, such as the United Kingdom, while the Red forces were largely on their own.

¹⁵⁷ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, pp. 38–39.

¹⁵⁸ While the Bolsheviks massacred "counter-revolutionary" elements, the White forces frequently killed Jews. This was primarily due to the belief that Jews constituted the majority of the Bolshevik leadership as well as the secret police units. There was a degree of truth to these accusations, but it was used as a pretext to kill Jews indiscriminately (Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 676–677).

¹⁵⁹ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, pp. 39.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 39.

support the Red Army but they were only a minority.¹⁶¹ The vast majority of the clergy either actively supported the White forces, or quietly favoured it. Some of these clergy believed that Tikhon had been too compliant with the Bolsheviks and they formed their own synods. One of the groups was called the Karlovci Synod, and they were determined to fight against the Reds until the very end.¹⁶² Although they were not excommunicated, they were strongly condemned by the Church.¹⁶³ In the Church's view, groups such as these did more harm than good, because they unwittingly encouraged the Bolsheviks to continue viewing the Church as a rebellious element of society.

To completely break the influence of the Church the Bolsheviks needed to prove the superiority of communism to the general population. Such a task was difficult as most of the peasants merely wanted to regain their land and grow enough food to feed themselves. As such, they were not guaranteed to support the Bolshevik "class struggle" and the war was seen as an impediment to their own desires. The Bolsheviks also implemented a number of measures that greatly angered the peasants. In 1918, Lenin and Trotsky implemented "War Communism." This policy was used to mobilize the Red economy for war against the White forces by seizing control of all food, land, and industry for the war effort. However, War Communism was used also as a tool to crush "capitalist" elements behind the Red lines and many peasants had their own land and food confiscated.¹⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, this policy caused a tremendous amount of anger against the communists as many peasants and workers came to resent the reality of the "worker's paradise" they had been promised. It was during this time that the White forces experienced the most success and this in turn caused the Bolsheviks to resort to the "Red Terror" to maintain

¹⁶¹ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 376.

¹⁶² Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, pp. 113–114.

¹⁶³ Ibid, pp. 123–125.

¹⁶⁴ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 613–614.

their position. They threatened the complete extermination of all counter-revolutionary elements, and this extended to the attempted genocide of certain populations, such as the Cossacks in Southern Russia.¹⁶⁵ The Red Terror led to the brutal torture and massacre of tens of thousands of people. Some of these atrocities included the massacre of entire towns, sawing people into half, throwing them into boiling water, having their skin peeled off, and crucifixion.¹⁶⁶ The Church condemned these brutal actions but its protests were ignored.¹⁶⁷

The Terror continued throughout the civil war, and the Bolsheviks were able to rally the peasants to their side despite their savage actions. The turning point occurred in the summer of 1919 when Poland launched an invasion of the Soviet Union. This invasion coincided with a White offensive against Moscow, and this allowed the Bolsheviks to claim that they were fighting for the freedom of the Russian people against foreign invasion and influence.¹⁶⁸ The White forces were also being supplied by the Western Powers, and this fact made it appear as though the Whites were merely puppets acting on behalf of a foreign master.¹⁶⁹ The Bolsheviks realized that they could not unite people behind communism, but they could appeal to Russian nationalism and the need to defend the Motherland from foreign invasion. This “call to arms” allowed them to secure popular support and gain the upper hand over the White forces.¹⁷⁰

Despite this newly found support, the Bolsheviks remained unable to break the influence of the Church, and its propaganda attempts to connect it to foreign influence were also

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 660.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 645–647.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 647–649.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 697–699.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 651–652. Nearly 30,000 British, American, French, Italian, and Czechoslovakian soldiers fought for the White forces in Siberia. In addition, an enormous number of military supplies and equipment were also given to the White army (Ibid, p. 652).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 698–700. Perhaps most importantly, the Polish invasion caused General Brusilov to join the Red Army. Brusilov was one of Russia’s most iconic war heroes from World War I, and his siding with the Reds was a major propaganda victory for the Bolsheviks.

unsuccessful. However, an opportunity presented itself in 1921 during the Volga famine. Famines were common in Russia during this time due to both the civil war as well as the food confiscations that were carried out by the communists. The Church was quick to organize a relief campaign, and this caused the Church's prestige to be raised in the eyes of the population.¹⁷¹ This action was clearly not favourable to the Bolsheviks and their response was to demand that the Church hand over all of its valuables, including the utensils used in the Divine Liturgy, to allegedly provide the money necessary to feed the starving people.¹⁷² Tikhon agreed to do this with the exception of handing over the sacred utensils, but he promised to provide an equivalent amount of money in their stead.¹⁷³ The Bolsheviks used this opportunity to portray the Church as being indifferent to the people's sufferings and launched a fresh wave of persecution in 1922. Accordingly, the Church relief program was ended, all Church valuables were confiscated, and over 8,000 clergymen were shot.¹⁷⁴ Patriarch Tikhon issued yet another condemnation of the Bolsheviks and called on the clergy to preserve the sacred utensils. This action resulted in his arrest and it left the Church vulnerable to the left-leaning "Renovationist" faction that had Soviet support.¹⁷⁵

The Renovationists, also known as the "Living Church," consisted of left-leaning clergy that sought to synthesize Christianity and Marxism. They believed that the Orthodox Church had lost touch with the true purpose and meaning of Christianity by aligning itself with the reactionary forces that were, in their view, suppressing the workers.¹⁷⁶ Metropolitan Sergei was

¹⁷¹ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, pp. 378–379.

¹⁷² The valuables that were seized were mostly used to resupply the Red Army, not to aid the starving people (Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 380).

¹⁷³ Erdozain, *The Dangerous God*, p. 24.

¹⁷⁴ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 380. Chaillot's numbers are supported by Pospelovsky (*The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime*, p. 99).

¹⁷⁵ Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 26–27.

¹⁷⁶ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, pp. 50–51.

widely recognized to be the leader of this movement and, although the Renovationist leaders did not agree with the Bolsheviks heavy-handed approach to dealing with religion, they praised Lenin for creating a more equal society, reversing Tikhon's 1918 excommunication of the Bolsheviks.¹⁷⁷ Despite their new-found power and prominence, the Renovationists experienced a number of difficulties. Their first problem was that they were only being used by the Bolsheviks to create a schism within the Church, and thus the leaders the Bolsheviks had chosen were selected based on their loyalty. Many of these individuals were opportunistic lower clergy that had little experience in handling the matters of the institutional Church, and given the prevalence of opportunism, the Renovationists were plagued by a lack of unity.¹⁷⁸ Although the Bolsheviks had given them control over the churches, they were unable to undermine the Tikhonite loyalists due to a lack of support in the rural areas of the country.¹⁷⁹ Communism was still not popular among most of the rural population, and Tikhon had declared the Renovationist Church to be in schism which further undermined their authority in the eyes of the majority of Orthodox Christians.¹⁸⁰ The lack of obedience to the Renovationists was also due to the Church reforms that had occurred in 1917-1918. Although the Renovationists controlled the institutional Church, the majority of individual churches were now independent from it and they chose to remain loyal to Tikhon.¹⁸¹ In 1923, Tikhon was released from prison which caused many Renovationist clergy to ask for forgiveness and return to the Patriarchal Church.¹⁸² This event did not end the

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 51 and pp. 56–57.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 51–56.

¹⁷⁹ Catherine Wanner, *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*. (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012), pp. 32–35.

¹⁸⁰ John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917-1950, 1st Edition*. (Basic Russian Books in Western Language, Series 3, History. Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), pp. 166–168.

¹⁸¹ Wanner, *State Secularism and Lived Religion*, pp. 32–35.

¹⁸² Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, p. 59.

Renovationist schism, but it did cripple what little support they had left and they were forced to wait for Tikhon's death in 1925 before they could attempt to regain power.¹⁸³

A Temporary Reprieve

By the end of 1922, the Soviet government began to re-evaluate its attempts to destroy the Church and religion. There were a number of causes for this change of attitude, including Western pressure. In order to gain recognition from the Western Powers, the Bolsheviks were pressured to end the persecution of the Church.¹⁸⁴ This occurred at the Genoa Conference of 1922 where, in return for Western recognition, the Bolsheviks agreed to release Tikhon from prison under the condition that he issue a statement of loyalty to the Soviet State.¹⁸⁵ Tikhon made such a declaration in June 1923, where he apologized for his previous "anti-Soviet" actions and stated that he was now a loyal citizen of the Soviet State.¹⁸⁶ There were also political reasons for the Bolsheviks to change their anti-Church policies. They were attempting to increase the appeal of socialism among the rural population, and thus new regulations were being created to avoid alienating them. In 1923, the arbitrary closing of churches was deemed to be counter-productive and ordered to stop.¹⁸⁷ The Soviets also realized that despite the destruction of over 20,000 churches in the last four years, the Orthodox Church was still a powerful force and had over 50,000 churches in operation.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, the Church still employed over half a million people, and this figure was equivalent to the number of members of the Bolshevik party.¹⁸⁹ Due

¹⁸³ Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State*, pp. 173–174.

¹⁸⁴ Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 28–29.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 28–29. British influence was particularly important in securing his release.

¹⁸⁶ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, pp. 59–60.

¹⁸⁷ Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 32–33.

¹⁸⁸ S. G. Pushkarev, Vladimir Stepanov, and Yakunin Gleb, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union: Reflections on the Millennium*. Ccrs Series on Change in Contemporary Soviet Society. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p. 55.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 56.

to the clear lack of success of violent persecution, it was decided to focus on a propaganda campaign against the Church. This propaganda, combined with the growing acceptance of socialism by the masses, would strike the final blow against the Church.¹⁹⁰ Lenin was also growing increasingly ill and incapable of leading the Soviet Union, and many of the Party officials were becoming more concerned about the issue of Lenin's succession and the inevitable conflict between Trotsky and Stalin.¹⁹¹ This distraction offered the Church a brief reprieve.

Summary

The Orthodox Church suffered greatly during the Leninist years, but it was still a formidable institution. Many clergy had been murdered or imprisoned and an enormous number of churches had been destroyed. However, the Church had retained its position among the people and its resilience had managed to convince the Bolsheviks that new methods were necessary to break its power. The Church also managed to withstand the Renovationist schismatics and was able to preserve its independence from the Soviet state. These feats had been accomplished by the Church's refusal to directly oppose the Bolsheviks, and thus risk reinforcing their propaganda that the Church was a "counterrevolutionary" institution. The reforms that had taken place under the Provisional Government had also given the Church a great deal of flexibility in terms of its leadership, and this reduced the amount of damage the Bolsheviks could inflict via arrests and execution. With the establishment of the Soviet Union after the Civil War, the new government needed to pay greater attention to internal and external political factors when dealing with the Church, and this new reality forced the Bolsheviks to consider the wisdom of attacking an

¹⁹⁰ Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 30–31.

¹⁹¹ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 125–132.

institution that had popular support. Thus, the Church entered the Stalinist era as a battered, but far from broken, institution.

Chapter 3: Revival, Decimation, and Endurance

The death of Lenin in 1924 resulted in many changes within the Soviet Union. Major power struggles broke out immediately, particularly between Leon Trotsky and Josef Stalin. The Church also underwent its own changes, spurned on by the death of Patriarch Tikhon in 1925. Thus, both the Soviet government and the Russian Orthodox Church had new leadership, and subsequently new priorities, in the coming struggles. This chapter will examine how Stalin's regime impacted the Russian Orthodox Church and non-Orthodox Christians living within the Soviet Union between 1924–1941.

Stalin's Rise to Power

Lenin's health had been deteriorating since 1921 and this gave Stalin the opportunity to begin to increase his power and influence within the Communist Party. Lenin experienced the first of several major strokes in May 1922 and these left him severely incapacitated for the two remaining years of his life.¹⁹² During this time, the Soviet Union was ruled by a triumvirate that consisted of Josef Stalin, Lev Kamenev, and Grigory Zinoviev, and this alliance sought to prevent Leon Trotsky from succeeding Lenin as the leader of the Soviet Union.¹⁹³ This was a political alliance of convenience, as the three Soviet leaders all distrusted one another. Lenin preferred that Trotsky succeed him, but his various illnesses made it impossible for him to

¹⁹² Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 793.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 795.

prevent Stalin from consolidating his position.¹⁹⁴ Stalin had control over who was able to come into contact with Lenin and this enabled him to force Trotsky out of all positions of influence by the time of Lenin's death.¹⁹⁵ This was primarily accomplished through a combination of selective usage of Lenin's writings. For example, Lenin's *Testament* that condemned Stalin's suppression of opposing views in the Politburo was never presented at the Party Congress in 1923, yet when Trotsky's faction made similar accusations, Stalin quickly utilized Lenin's writings that condemned "factionalism" in the party.¹⁹⁶ These manipulations allowed Stalin to force Trotsky out of the government in 1925, and eventually expel him from Russia in 1929.¹⁹⁷ Stalin's allies in the Politburo continued to underestimate him and his goals and this allowed Stalin to gradually dominate the Party and threaten dissenters with expulsion.¹⁹⁸ By 1929, Stalin's ascendency was complete and his rivals had either been imprisoned or had been threatened into silence.¹⁹⁹

During this time there was a relaxation of the official persecution of the Church. Instead, the focus was on waging a propaganda battle against the Church and the religious culture that was associated with it. In order to destroy this Christian culture, the Bolsheviks sought to establish the "New Soviet Man" that was free of traditional constraints and worked towards the establishment of the socialist "Worker's Paradise."²⁰⁰ This new man was to be atheist, collectivist, and guided by science as well as technology. In order to create this new man, the

¹⁹⁴ Figes, Orlando. *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 127–128.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, pp. 132–133.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 129–131.

¹⁹⁷ Expelling Trotsky was not enough for Stalin as the spectre of a potential "Trotskyist Plot" against his power continued to haunt him. Such paranoia culminated in the "Great Terror" of 1937–1938 where hundreds of thousands of people were eventually killed for allegedly being a part of this plot. Stalin eventually ordered the NKVD to assassinate Trotsky and they were successful on August 21, 1940 when they managed to find him and kill him in Mexico City.

¹⁹⁸ Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin*. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1949), pp. 312–317.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 317–318.

²⁰⁰ Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 78–79.

Bolsheviks had to destroy the traditional Christian family unit as this was where children spent their formative years.²⁰¹ Women in particular were targeted by the Bolsheviks because they were seen as being more religious than men and they were primarily responsible for raising the next generation.²⁰² In order to crush the traditional family, the Bolsheviks initially encouraged feminist ideology, particularly the rights to divorce, abortion, and free love in order to “liberate” women from the tyranny of their patriarchal husbands.²⁰³ Men and women were both to become highly disciplined workers and this discipline, combined with science, would liberate both men and women from the shackles of backwards religious thinking.²⁰⁴ Children were no longer to be raised by the family, instead, they were to be raised in “communal houses” in which men and women took turns parenting them.²⁰⁵ The education system was also changed to teach this new communist worldview. Children were to be taught the importance of communal living and service while being prepared to become the “technological elite” of the Soviet state by training for lives in engineering and other scientific pursuits.²⁰⁶

The old order was also mocked at every opportunity and contrasted with the new communist system. The Bolsheviks began to spread rumours that Orthodox icons were responsible for the spread of disease (icons were frequently kissed by the faithful) and even crop failure.²⁰⁷ Additionally, the Bolsheviks frequently filmed or recorded peasant workers stating

²⁰¹ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, p. 142.

²⁰² Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 79–81.

²⁰³ Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, pp. 740–741. These anti-family measures were later repealed in the mid 1930’s. Although their effectiveness against the Church was very limited, they devastated Soviet social and moral life. This caused great concern for the Soviet government, as it led to increased crime rates and dramatically reduced the nation’s birthrate. This became particularly problematic after the man-made famines in the early 30’s and threatened the nation’s ability to maintain a source of military manpower (Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 183–184).

²⁰⁴ Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, pp. 742–743.

²⁰⁵ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 142–143.

²⁰⁶ Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, pp. 740–741.

²⁰⁷ Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 85–86.

that when they disposed of the icons in favour of new tractors, their yields increased.²⁰⁸ While such statements may seem inconsequential or even very strange to modern readers, this was a major demoralization campaign by the Bolsheviks that was designed to supplant faith in God's Providence with trust in modern technology. Priests were caricatured as being unintelligent and abusive. For instance, fake debates on the question of God's existence were also arranged where priests spontaneously declared before the audience that they had been corrected, convinced that God did not exist, and that they had been deceiving the population.²⁰⁹ State propaganda also presented priests as supporting a husband's supposed right to beat his wife and that this behaviour was endorsed by the Church and even by Christ Himself.²¹⁰

The Bolshevik propaganda campaign was conducted mostly by a state-sponsored organization called the "Soviet League of the Militant Godless." This organization was formed in 1925 and its membership peaked in the early 1930's.²¹¹ The League was one of the means that the Soviet government used to try to spread atheism among the rural population as the lack of adequate transportation and communication in Russia made Bolshevik propaganda efforts much more difficult. Thus, the League functioned as an atheist missionary organization that sought to provide Soviet citizens with an "atheist church." The League was built around cells of Communist Party members and local volunteers that sought to promote and distribute atheist propaganda.²¹² This was largely accomplished via their newspaper *Bezbozhnik* and by hosting staged debates. They also established anti-religious universities that educated the cells, as well as local populations, in subjects such as biology, physics, and "Christian mythology."²¹³ Many of

²⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 85–86.

²⁰⁹ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 746.

²¹⁰ Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 79–81.

²¹¹ Ibid, p. 44.

²¹² Ibid, pp. 44–45.

²¹³ Ibid, pp. 182–183.

the League's meetings were held in factories as they sought to establish a "worker's family" that attempted to provide atheist citizens an alternative to a church family.²¹⁴ The League was also used as a source of agitation. League members created a "popular demand" in a village to close the local church, and then the Bolsheviks took the opportunity to shut down the church while also being able to claim that they were acting in the people's interest.²¹⁵

Finally, the Bolsheviks sought to forge atheism into an institutional replacement for the Orthodox Church. A cult of personality was developed where Christian saints were replaced by Lenin, Stalin, and Marx while religious icons were replaced by placards of these individuals.²¹⁶ The Red Star replaced the Cross as being the symbol that brought light and truth to the world.²¹⁷ Orthodox sacraments and rituals were also transformed into a communist counterpart. Children were no longer to be baptized, instead they were "Octobered."²¹⁸ Communist names, such as Rosa (for Rosa Luxemburg) and Marlen (a combination of "Marx" and "Lenin") replaced the traditional practice of naming children after the saints.²¹⁹ Marriages were held in factories rather than in churches and such weddings were officiated near a portrait of Lenin rather than an altar.²²⁰ Orthodox holidays were also replaced with communist ones. Christmas was replaced by the "Day of Industrialization" and Soviet holidays exalted a specific type of worker or an important event in communist history.²²¹ For instance, March 18th became the "Day of the Paris Commune," and the third Sunday of September became the "Day of the Forestry Worker."²²² Notably, the majority of these communist holidays fell on a Sunday which was clearly an attempt

²¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 84–85.

²¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 83–84.

²¹⁶ Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, pp. 63–64.

²¹⁷ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, pp. 747.

²¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 747–748.

²¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 747–748.

²²⁰ Ibid, pp. 747–748.

²²¹ Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, pp. 62–63.

²²² Ibid, pp. 62–63.

to suppress and replace church attendance. In 1918, the Soviet government had switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar to disrupt Orthodox holidays and there was even a brief attempt from 1932 to 1940 to replace the seven-day week with a six-day week to eliminate Sundays entirely.²²³ Heaven was replaced by the promise of a future material paradise on earth that all Soviet citizens were exhorted to contribute to and work towards.²²⁴ It is important to note that Lenin had opposed many of these measures, especially his own deification, as, in his view, they betrayed the principles of a scientific communist revolution.²²⁵ However, such a cult was very useful to Stalin, both as a tool to bolster his own position and to create a replacement religion for Orthodoxy. Shortly after Lenin's death, Stalin defied his wishes to be buried by his mother and instead had him embalmed in Red Square in Moscow.²²⁶ Just as Lenin had been the centre of communism, Moscow became the centre of the new communist order in Russia. The "Spirit of Leninism" was invoked constantly by Stalin as he restructured the Soviet Union to reflect his own image with his own goals.

A Christian Revival

Between 1924 and 1929 the political infighting between the Bolsheviks gave the Orthodox Church a moment of respite. This was especially important due to the death of Patriarch Tikhon in April 1925 and the subsequent disputes regarding his succession. His final testament dictated that Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsk was to replace him.²²⁷ However, Peter was imprisoned in December 1925 and leadership then fell to Metropolitan Sergei, the ex-

²²³ Ibid, pp. 60–61.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 34.

²²⁵ Ibid, pp. 63–64.

²²⁶ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, p. 133.

²²⁷ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, pp. 384–385.

Renovationist leader.²²⁸ He too was arrested in 1926 and remained in prison for a year.²²⁹ In addition, bishops were arrested every six months and their posts were filled by anyone who was available.²³⁰ Thus, the Church's higher-ranking leadership was under constant arrest and imprisonment between 1925 and 1927, making it impossible for the leadership to stabilize itself. Lower clergy, such as priests, were not arrested at the same rate as the bishops, but they were also in a tenuous situation. They had lost all their land due to Soviet land ownership laws but, as they were part of the institutional Church, they were considered employees of a private organization and thus had to pay heavy taxes despite having no income.²³¹ These measures left the majority of the priests destitute and at the mercy of private charity.

Sergei's release in the summer of 1927 soon caused more schism within the Church. Officially, he was acting as the temporary replacement for Metropolitan Peter, as Peter was still under arrest. However, Sergei issued his "Declaration of Loyalty" soon after his release. This declaration stipulated that the Church recognized that a faithful Orthodox Christian could be a loyal citizen of the Soviet Union and respect the government's authority.²³² Sergei hoped that this declaration would end accusations of "anti-Soviet" activity, as well as allow for some civil rights to return to the Church, such as the ability to re-open theological seminaries.²³³ His civil goals were fulfilled briefly but his decision was opposed by the majority of both free and imprisoned Orthodox clergy.²³⁴ These clergy did not believe that Sergei had the authority to

²²⁸ It is likely that Peter was arrested as part of the general anti-clergy arrests in 1925. Unlike Sergei however, Peter remained in prison until his death in 1936.

²²⁹ Pushkarev, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 57.

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 57.

²³¹ Pospelovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*, p. 44.

²³² Challiot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 385.

²³³ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, p. 104.

²³⁴ Although the majority of the clergy opposed his decision, Sergei's declaration did allow the Church to briefly re-open some religious schools and provide religious education to both children and adults in 1927. Individual churches were again allowed to offer recreational activities and church-organized sports. These programs were shut down again in October 1929 (Ibid, pp. 164–165).

make such an important decision, especially when Metropolitan Peter had refused to make such an agreement in 1925.²³⁵ When copies of Sergei's declaration were sent to churches throughout the Soviet Union, nearly ninety percent of the churches chose to return the document.²³⁶ Many Orthodox clergy and laity saw this as a capitulation in the face of Soviet pressure and a refusal to acknowledge the suffering of the Church and the clergy. While there is an understandable degree of truth to this accusation, Sergei's declaration did not radically alter the Church's stance towards the Soviet government and it did not violate any laws of the Church; but it did ensure that individual churches could remain open.²³⁷ Nonetheless, this declaration prompted many bishops to sever ties with the Sergei's Patriarchal Church and form new independent churches.²³⁸ These churches enjoyed considerable popularity, especially in the countryside, and they provided leadership for many other non-Patriarchal Orthodox movements.²³⁹

Despite the intense propaganda campaign and the new schisms within the Church, the Bolshevik campaign to replace the Church failed miserably. During the mid-1920's, religiosity was still high among the population, especially the rural population where nearly eighty-five percent of the population still attended church.²⁴⁰ This was despite the destruction of nearly ten-thousand churches between 1923 and 1928 (from 50,000 to 40,000).²⁴¹ The propaganda against the priests also was a clear failure. Peasants donated to the priests and their parishes so that they could pay the taxes that they were otherwise unable to pay.²⁴² Women were generally more

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 105.

²³⁶ Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground*, p. 59.

²³⁷ Ibid, pp. 56–57.

²³⁸ There is no evidence that Metropolitan Peter supported these groups. In fact, during the previous year he had allowed Sergei to make decisions as though he was the official leader of the Church. This fact was usually ignored by the schismatic groups due to Sergei's unpopularity and his Renovationist past (Ibid, p. 47).

²³⁹ Ibid, pp. 62–63.

²⁴⁰ Wanner, *State Secularism and Lived Religion*, pp. 41–42.

²⁴¹ Pushkarev, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 55 and Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, p. 53.

²⁴² Wanner, *State Secularism*, pp. 42–43.

religious than men, especially in the urban areas.²⁴³ This fact shows that the Bolshevik attempt to present the Church as being anti-woman had been a failure. Numerous statistics also showed that on average, religiosity had increased, sometimes even exceeding pre-revolution levels. For instance, churches in the city of Kharkov had 16,000 parishioners in 1925, but they had 27,000 thousand parishioners in 1927.²⁴⁴ Additionally, in 1914, there had been 10,565 priests but in 1927 that number had increased to 10,657.²⁴⁵ Although this was certainly a tiny increase, and the level of education of these new priests was generally lower than those in 1914, this was an amazing fact in light of the thousands of priests who had been killed and imprisoned during the Civil War.²⁴⁶ Peasants even formed bodyguards to protect the remaining bishops that had not been arrested and they frequently attended events, such as youth groups, that the bishops organized.²⁴⁷ Rather than turning people away from the Church, the Soviet propaganda campaign had caused a revitalization.

Non-Orthodox Soviet Christians generally fared even better than their Orthodox counterparts. Baptists and Evangelical Protestants in particular experienced tremendous growth during the “Golden Decade” of 1918–1928.²⁴⁸ These groups had been persecuted by the Orthodox Church during the Czarist era, but this came to an end when the Bolsheviks ended the Orthodox Church’s privileges. In 1908, the number of Baptists within Russia was about twenty-thousand but this number had increased to two-hundred thousand by 1928.²⁴⁹ Additionally, they had about three-thousand pastors and over one thousand meeting houses.²⁵⁰ Their efforts had

²⁴³ Ibid, pp. 42–43.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 43–44.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 44.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 44.

²⁴⁷ Pospielovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime Volume 1*, pp. 169–170.

²⁴⁸ House, *Millennium of Faith*, pp. 50–51.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 50–51. This impressive feat had been primarily accomplished through evangelism, especially among young people.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 50–51.

been assisted greatly by Baptist organizations around the world and this caused the Bolsheviks to begin to view them with suspicion.²⁵¹ Evangelicals of various denominations also had a significant following of over four million members in around three-thousand congregations, and they even had their own theological college in Moscow.²⁵² House churches of all denominations flourished during this time, particularly in the major cities. These were very difficult for the Bolsheviks to identify and criminalize as many of them were located in private homes.²⁵³ The only major non-Orthodox Church that did not see much growth was the Roman Catholic Church. Roman Catholicism had always been viewed with suspicion by the Russian people and this heavily restricted its ability to expand.²⁵⁴ The majority of Roman Catholic bishops and priests were arrested during this time, but Catholicism could count on support from the non-Russian Roman Catholic Church which allowed it to absorb the losses much more easily than the Orthodox Church could.²⁵⁵

The League of the Militant Godless had also failed to become a replacement for the Church. Their newspaper, *Bezbozhnik*, failed to gain popularity with the Soviet population despite steady distribution, advertisement, and financial support from the Soviet government.²⁵⁶ Their attempts to instill a naturalistic worldview in the peasantry and the workers was also a failure. In a debate with a priest, a member of the League declared that “nature had made itself” through the process of evolution and the peasant audience roared with laughter at this proposition.²⁵⁷ Factory workers were also resistant to the League’s propaganda and religion was beginning to make inroads into this traditionally pro-Bolshevik stronghold. This was likely due

²⁵¹ Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*, pp. 119–120.

²⁵² Ibid, p. 120. This school was later closed in 1929.

²⁵³ Kelly, *Socialist Churches*, pp. 34–35.

²⁵⁴ Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*, p. 150.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 149-150 and Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, p. 175.

²⁵⁶ Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, p. 103.

²⁵⁷ Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, p. 746.

to the fact that rural peasants were becoming more involved in industry which brought religion into the factory.²⁵⁸ Thus, the only consolation for the Bolsheviks was that urban-born workers were still generally pro-Bolshevik and that the youth were slowly becoming more irreligious.²⁵⁹ Overall, the religious trends of the nation were concerning for the Soviet government and they soon sought to reverse the religious revival that had occurred.

Stalin's Reign of Terror

The year 1928 initiated an era of tremendous change for both the Soviet Union and the Orthodox Church. Stalin was determined to transform the primarily agricultural Soviet Union into a modern industrial state in a very short amount of time. Additionally, he sought to crush growing nationalist movements within the Soviet Union and ensure that the various Socialist republics were in compliance with the Soviet state. This era became known as the “Great Break” as the Stalinist Soviet Union was far different, and far more totalitarian, than the Leninist Soviet Union had been. These changes were primarily political and economic in nature, but their implementation triggered many new waves of persecution against the Orthodox Church as well as the nonconformist churches.

Stalin’s first step in implementing his new vision for the Soviet Union was the first “Five-Year Plan” that occurred between 1928 and 1932. These years were characterized by the collectivization of agriculture and the destruction of the “kulak” class. The kulaks were farmers who owned their own land and sold their produce at local markets.²⁶⁰ Doing so had been legal since the implementation of the “New Economic Policy” (NEP) in 1921 as an attempt to rebuild

²⁵⁸ Wanner, *State Secularism*, 43.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 42–43.

²⁶⁰ Due to its agricultural potential, the Ukraine was home to the majority of kulaks.

the economy in the wake of the Civil War.²⁶¹ This policy had allowed groups such as the kulaks to become economically self-sufficient and this allegedly posed a capitalist threat to the Soviet Union. It is important to note that the NEP was not a capitalist system as the peasants were offered economic incentives to join state-run collectives, but there was little to no mandatory collectivization between 1921 and 1928.²⁶² This allowed the Soviet economy to rebuild itself during this time and economic prosperity returned to the peasant class in the wake of the highly destructive Civil War.²⁶³ Despite this economic revival, Stalin saw the economic independence of the kulaks as a threat to the survival of communism in the Soviet Union. This perceived threat led to his forced collectivization program during the Five-Year Plan.

There were other external political reasons for the Five-Year Plan. In the wake of the Civil War, the Bolsheviks had expected that Central and Eastern Europe would also become communist, particularly Germany and Italy.²⁶⁴ It was necessary for communism to spread to these nations so that they could provide a strong industrial base that could be utilized to bolster communist economic strength.²⁶⁵ However, nationalist German *Freikorps* units (demobilized World War I soldiers who volunteered to fight communism) and Italian Fascists under Mussolini had suppressed the communist strikes and uprisings in those nations.²⁶⁶ Thus, Stalin believed that it was necessary for the Soviet Union to build up its own industry to protect the Revolution within the Soviet Union, even if it came at the expense of the agricultural sector.

²⁶¹ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 135–137.

²⁶² Ibid, pp. 139–141.

²⁶³ Ibid, pp. 140–141.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 139.

²⁶⁵ The Soviet Union created the Communist International (Comintern) shortly after the Revolution broke out. It had been intended as an organization where all communist states co-operated with each other with the goal of establishing a global communist order under Soviet leadership. This project experienced a major setback due to the failure to spread communism in Eastern and Central Europe.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 139.

The collectivization plan was announced in 1928 and it quickly became extremely unpopular. The peasants were not willing to give up their traditional way of life and lose their freedom and this led to force being used against them. Between 1929 and 1931, tens of millions of peasants were forced onto the new collective farms.²⁶⁷ Any peasants who resisted were branded with the term “kulak” regardless of their economic status and they were either killed or sent to the Gulag prison system. It is estimated that nearly six million alleged kulaks (about five percent of the total peasant population) fell victim to this fate.²⁶⁸

The new collective farms were also a failure. They had been intended to be a more efficient means of growing food and this enabled more of the population to be transferred into industrial work. However, they were incompetently managed and lacked adequate machinery, seeds, and animals to grow food.²⁶⁹ The peasants were expected to grow food for the collectives, which was then deposited in state granaries, while also having to grow their own food on a few private plots of land that they were given.²⁷⁰ Predictably, famine soon broke out and it ravaged the Soviet Union between 1930 and 1933, especially in the last two years. It is impossible to determine the number of deaths, but at least several million people died due to starvation and disease.²⁷¹ The Ukraine was hit particularly hard, as it had higher than average quotas and Stalin refused to release grain that could have alleviated the situation. Lazar Kaganovich, the leader of the collectivization efforts in the Ukraine, allowed this starvation to occur so that other peasants were encouraged to work harder.²⁷² It has also been argued that Stalin starved millions of

²⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 151–154.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 150–153.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 155.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 155.

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 155.

²⁷² Ibid, pp. 155–156.

Ukrainians to death so that he could crush a growing nationalist movement.²⁷³ The Soviet government was only willing to release grain for the urban areas of the nation, so as not to interfere with industrial production, while rural areas were left to fend for themselves.²⁷⁴ This triggered a tidal wave of refugees pouring into the cities and although the cities could not handle the influx, they did provide a cheap source of labour for Stalin's industrialization project.²⁷⁵ Stalin was partially successful in his attempt to transform the Soviet Union into a modern industrial state, but it was achieved only through an immense loss of life and the utilization of slave labour.

Stalin was determined to use collectivization as an opportunity to destroy the Orthodox Church as well as the nonconformists. In 1928, he officially announced his intention to destroy the clergy and end their alleged attempts to turn the peasants against communism.²⁷⁶ In 1929, new laws were passed that severely restricted the remaining freedom of the churches. Evangelization became illegal, church groups were banned, and children were forcibly enrolled in anti-religious groups, such as the League of the Militant Godless.²⁷⁷ Clergy were forced to pay even higher taxes, and they could no longer count on support from the peasants because the peasants had lost almost everything they owned due to their forced collectivization.²⁷⁸ Receiving foreign aid was no longer legal and this especially hurt the nonconformists.²⁷⁹ A fresh wave of

²⁷³ This view is disputed, but some historians and nations have recognized this event, known as the Holodomor, to be a genocide against the Ukrainian people (*Ibid*, pp. 155–156). An argument in favour of the genocide view is that there was more than enough grain to feed the population, yet Stalin refused to distribute it to the population and even exported grain to other countries during this time. Additionally, Ukrainian civilians were forbidden from leaving the Ukraine, as Soviet troops sealed the Russian-Ukrainian border (Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides. Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity*. [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010], pp. 74–77).

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 74–75.

²⁷⁵ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 156–158.

²⁷⁶ Pushkarev, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 59.

²⁷⁷ Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*, pp. 41–42.

²⁷⁸ Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State*, p. 231.

²⁷⁹ Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*, p. 120. The nonconformists were also hit disproportionately hard by the collectivization because most of them were drawn from the kulak class.

arrests were unleashed and this was coupled with the closing of numerous churches. Sergei condemned the closures of the churches and the often-bloody clashes that accompanied them.²⁸⁰ The Soviet government did face opposition to these measures in 1930 and briefly relented. The peasants, in particular, greatly opposed the closure and destruction of their churches, and this led to a temporary cessation of anti-church activities because it threatened to reduce food production.²⁸¹ Additionally, on February 2, 1930, Pope Pius XI had called on Christians around the world to pray for Russian Christians, which damaged the Soviet reputation throughout the world.²⁸² However, this reprieve was short-lived. In 1931, church closures began again, and in 1932 the total number of churches (of all denominations) in the Soviet Union had been reduced to 28,000.²⁸³ Clergy were also forced out of the major cities. For instance, in 1933, two hundred clergy in Leningrad (one-third of the total) were forced to leave the city and their churches were subsequently closed.²⁸⁴ Despite these actions however, religiosity continued to grow throughout Russia, especially in the rural regions, between 1932 and 1936.²⁸⁵

There was another slight relaxation in persecution between 1934 and 1936 and the reasons for this were yet again political. In 1933, Stalin had been convinced to temporarily forsake the idea of a “global revolution” due to the normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States, as well as the rise of the National Socialists in Germany.²⁸⁶ The Soviet Union needed, and was gaining, international support and this contributed to Stalin’s decision to relent.²⁸⁷ This did not mean the closure of churches completely ceased. In 1935, a major

²⁸⁰ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 387–388.

²⁸¹ Pushkarev, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 60–61.

²⁸² Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 388.

²⁸³ Pushkarev, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 61.

²⁸⁴ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 389.

²⁸⁵ Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground*, p. 101.

²⁸⁶ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, pp. 388–389.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 388–389.

Renovationist church in Leningrad, the Cathedral of the Assumption, was closed and destroyed.²⁸⁸ However, this action was an exception during this period as most churches experienced a moment of peace.

The major turning point came in 1936. Stalin had become increasingly concerned about the Soviet Union's international position and its internal stability. In the Far East, Japan had been aggressively probing Soviet positions along the Manchurian border.²⁸⁹ In Europe, Stalin feared that Poland was turning towards Germany rather than the Soviet Union, and that the Western Powers were unwilling to confront Italian and German Fascism.²⁹⁰ However, of greatest concern to Stalin were events that occurred during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) that had broken out in July. This conflict pitted the “Nationalists,” an alliance of Spanish conservatives, traditionalists, and fascists led by General Francisco Franco against the “Republicans,” which consisted of Spanish democrats and communists. During the battle for Madrid, the Nationalist general Emilio Mola stated that he had a “fifth column” within the city that would rise against the Republicans during the battle.²⁹¹ This statement, combined with the battles that broke out between the democratic and communist Republican forces, convinced Stalin that it was necessary to crush any potential traitors within the Soviet Union.²⁹² This crackdown became known as the “Great Terror.”

The Terror began in 1937 and reached its peak during 1938. Stalin was worried by a potential Trotskyist plot within his inner circle and this fear caused him to annihilate many of the “Old Bolsheviks” that had previously disagreed with or opposed him.²⁹³ In a series of show

²⁸⁸ Pushkarev, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 61.

²⁸⁹ O. V. Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*. Translated by Nora Seligman Favorov. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 153.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 153.

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 153.

²⁹² Ibid, pp. 153–154.

²⁹³ Getty, *The Road to Terror*, pp. 248-249 and pp. 259–260.

trials, prominent Bolsheviks such as Nikolai Bukharin and Genrikh Yagoda “confessed” under torture to being part of a plot to overthrow Stalin on Trotsky’s orders from abroad.²⁹⁴ Thousands of Soviet military leaders were also purged due to their supposed involvement in this alleged coup.²⁹⁵ The Terror soon had an impact on mainstream Soviet society. Citizens and families were obligated to report on another for potential espionage, and those who were accused were imprisoned or even shot without any evidence being presented of their involvement.²⁹⁶ The NKVD (the Soviet secret police) had been issued regional quotas of people to kill and this led to an enormous amount of innocent life being lost.²⁹⁷ It is estimated that nearly one and a half million people were arrested and over half a million of them were executed.²⁹⁸

The Orthodox Church, the Renovationists, the Roman Catholic Church, and the nonconformists all suffered greatly under the Terror. Soviet propaganda had successfully managed to connect the Church with the supposed plot against the government and this allowed the state to finally crush churches throughout the Soviet Union while also preventing Sergei from being able to offer any resistance.²⁹⁹ Sergei was unable to respond due to the Declaration of Loyalty that he had given to the Soviet government, and this hamstrung his ability to offer any support to the clergy that were now being accused of treason. The consequences were enormous; vast numbers of churches were soon closed and tens of thousands of clergy and religious citizens

²⁹⁴ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 194-196. Bukharin had been the editor of the Party newspaper *Pravda* and had been involved in the creation of the NEP under Lenin. He had earned Stalin’s distrust due to his questioning of the effectiveness of collectivization and this resulted in him being found guilty and executed. Yagoda had been the director of the NKVD, but he was accused of supporting Trotsky. This resulted in him being tried for treason and was subsequently killed by the new NKVD director Nikolai Yezhov.

²⁹⁵ Stéphane Courtois, and Mark Kramer, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*. Cambridge, Mass.: (Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 198.

²⁹⁶ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 199-203.

²⁹⁷ Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, pp. 150–151,

²⁹⁸ Getty, *The Road to Terror*., p. 492. The *Black Book of Communism* presents similar numbers. Specifically, 1,575,000 people were arrested by the NKVD. 1,345,000 people received a sentence and 681,692 of them were executed (Courtois, *The Black Book of Communism*, p. 190).

²⁹⁹ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 391.

were soon shot. In 1937 alone, 8,000 churches were closed and over 80,000 people were executed.³⁰⁰ The Renovationist leadership was almost entirely killed or imprisoned in 1937, and in the same year thirty-five of Sergei's archbishops disappeared without a trace.³⁰¹ Sergei's priests did not fare any better. In 1930, Leningrad had over 1,000 priests but this had been reduced to a mere fifteen in 1937.³⁰² The number of Orthodox, Orthodox schismatic, and Renovationist priests and monks had fallen from 60,000 in 1930 to just 3,000 in 1940.³⁰³ Of this number, roughly 45,000 had been either executed or had died in prison.³⁰⁴ The number of Orthodox churches had also been drastically reduced. In 1932 there had been 28,000 churches but this number had fallen to just 4,200 in 1940.³⁰⁵ Roman Catholics and nonconformists were also devastated. In 1936, there had been fifty Roman Catholic priests and churches within the Soviet Union but this number was reduced to just two in 1939.³⁰⁶ Likewise, there had been 3,219 nonconformist churches in 1928 but this had been reduced to less than 1,000 by 1940.³⁰⁷ Thus, in just two years Christian churches and leadership of all denominations had been decimated by the Soviet government.

In the summer of 1938, Stalin began to introduce measures that gradually ended the Terror. Again, his reasons were influenced by the political situation in which the Soviet Union found itself. The mass arrests and executions had begun to cause the Soviet people to question whether there were truly so many enemies within their nation and whether their justice system could be trusted.³⁰⁸ Rather than risk having the people lose faith in his leadership, Stalin ordered

³⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 391–392.

³⁰¹ Pushkarev, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union*, pp. 64–66.

³⁰² Ibid, p. 65.

³⁰³ House, *Millennium of Faith*, pp. 64–65.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, pp. 64–65.

³⁰⁵ Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, pp. 53.

³⁰⁶ Pushkarev, *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 61.

³⁰⁷ Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*, p. 120.

³⁰⁸ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia*, p. 203.

the NKVD to be more cautious and conduct arrests only if they could provide evidence of a suspect's potential treason.³⁰⁹ Tens of thousands of people were soon released from prison and this restored the people's confidence in Stalin and his leadership.³¹⁰

However, despite the tremendous destruction of the Great Terror it did not lead to a massive rejection of faith in God. A census in 1937 revealed that over half of the Soviet population believed in the existence of God.³¹¹ Obviously this does not mean all of them were Orthodox Christians, or even Christians of another denomination, but this statistic showed that despite the attempt to link religious leaders with the anti-Stalin plot, the majority of Soviet citizens continued to cling to a faith. This presented the Soviet government with a difficult situation. They had largely destroyed the Orthodox Church as an institution, but they had failed to sever its ties with the people.³¹² According to Soviet thinking, religion was based in the churches and if the churches were destroyed, religion would soon die out.³¹³ This had not occurred, and it left the Soviets without a clear approach that it could utilize to destroy the people's faith in God.

Fortunately for the Soviet government, the international situation provided an opportunity for them to restore the Orthodox Church without making the government appear desperate or indecisive about the issue of religion. The onset of World War II in September of 1939 meant that it was very likely that the Soviet Union would eventually be drawn into the conflict. This occurred on June 22, 1941, when Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. Axis forces rapidly conquered vast areas of the Soviet Union, including Eastern

³⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 203.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 203.

³¹¹ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 392–393.

³¹² Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty*, p. 49.

³¹³ Erdozain, *The Dangerous God*, p. 27.

Poland, the Baltic States, Belarus, Ukraine, and, by the fall of 1941 they were advancing on major Soviet cities. Behind the German lines, Soviet citizens, with German support, had begun to rebuild the churches that the Soviet government had previously destroyed.³¹⁴ This convinced Stalin to approach Sergei with an offer that allowed Sergei to re-open and rebuild the churches in Soviet territory in return for the Orthodox Church's assistance in rallying the Soviet people to defend the Motherland against the German invasion.³¹⁵ Sergei agreed to this proposal and churches soon began to re-open throughout the Soviet Union. Soviet policy changed so drastically that even the League of the Militant Godless was disbanded so that it could not interfere with the reconstruction of the churches.³¹⁶ Thus, in a very short amount of time, the Orthodox Church had gone from being a devastated institution to becoming an important part of the Soviet war effort. Just as the Church had been nearly destroyed due to Stalin's political objectives, so to was it be rebuilt due to Stalin's political needs.

Summary

The fate of the Orthodox Church during the Stalinist era was closely connected to the political situation in the Soviet Union. The Church had prospered during the Bolshevik infighting between 1923 and 1928, after which the Church suffered as Stalin transformed the Soviet Union into an industrial totalitarian state. Sergei was unable to prevent the near-total destruction of the Orthodox Church, but the Church continued to retain the support of the Soviet people despite it being portrayed as a treacherous institution and its leadership and churches being subsequently decimated. Despite heavy persecution and nearly incessant propaganda, the Soviet government could not destroy the people's faith in God, and this realization, combined with the German

³¹⁴Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty*, pp. 50–51.

³¹⁵Ibid, pp. 50–51.

³¹⁶Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, pp. 221–222.

invasion in 1941, caused them to decide that the Church was highly useful as an ally and as a source of national unity. This reluctant admission of defeat signified that the Bolsheviks, despite their formidable material strength, could not break the faith and spirit of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as all other expressions of Russian Christianity.

Conclusion

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18)

Just as Jesus Christ promised that His Church would face persecution, He also promised that the Church would prevail over its enemies. This guarantee immediately follows Peter’s confession of faith in Christ as the Son of God. Saint John Chrysostom comments that “this rock” is not the person of Peter, rather, it is his confession of faith.³¹⁷ Likewise, Saint Augustine of Hippo declared that Peter represents the faithful believer, and therefore this promise of perseverance is extended to all confessing Christians throughout all ages.³¹⁸ No matter what methods the enemies of the Church will use to try to destroy her, God has promised and decreed that their plans will ultimately fail.

Christians living in the Soviet Union had to endure the most brutal assault that the “gates of hell” have mounted against the Universal Church to date. The losses are staggering. There had been 54,000 Orthodox churches in Russia in 1914. By 1941, the number was 4,200.³¹⁹ Tens of thousands of priests lost their lives, and if Chaillot’s total of 8,000 killed during the 1922 famine

³¹⁷ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies of the Gospel of Saint Matthew*. (from Philip Schaff. *The Complete Works of the Church Fathers*. (Toronto, Canada, 2016. This material is available in the public domain), Homily 54 chapter 3.

³¹⁸ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*. (from Schaff. *The Complete Works of the Church Fathers*.), Sermon 26 chapters 2-4.

³¹⁹ Froese, *The Plot to Kill God*, p. 53.

crisis are combined with Pospielovsky's number of 25,000-30,000 killed during the Great Terror, this results with the minimum number of murdered clergy being approximately 35,000.³²⁰ This number does not include those who were killed during 1918–1921, those who died during the “lesser persecutions” that occurred between 1923 and 1936, or the losses that monastic orders suffered. Numbers are nearly impossible to determine for certain, but Pospielovsky estimates that nearly 20,000 additional deaths could be added to the total.³²¹ Thus, the number of Orthodox clergy that were killed by the Bolsheviks between 1917 and 1941 could range from 30,000 to 60,000. This total only accounts for the Orthodox Church, and therefore if Protestant and Roman Catholic losses are added the numbers will be slightly higher. Because the destruction of a church was usually accompanied by the death of the priest (or pastor), it can be estimated that 2,000 (mostly Protestant) deaths can be added to the 30,000–60,000 figure.³²² It is even more difficult to determine the number of laymen who were killed. It is unknown how many people perished under the Bolshevik regime during this time, but the numbers provided can range anywhere between the high millions or even above ten million.³²³ Since the majority of those who died lived in the more-religious rural regions of the nation (and thus were the primary target of the collectivization efforts), it is extremely likely that the number of laymen who died is in the millions as well.

How was the Orthodox Church able to survive such an attack? This question can best be answered by stating that the Church's reforms laid the groundwork for the Church to endure, while Bolshevik missteps ensured that they could never succeed in destroying the entire Church.

³²⁰ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 380 and Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*, p. 68.

³²⁰ Chaillot, *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe*, p. 385.

³²¹ Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*, p. 68.

³²² Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity*, p. 120.

³²³ For a more in-depth discussion, see previously mentioned sources such *A People's Tragedy*, *Revolutionary Russia*, *The Black Book of Communism*, and *Stalin's Genocides*.

The reforms that the Church enacted during the time of the Provisional Government provided the Church with the flexibility that it needed to resist the Bolsheviks. Instead of being a “top down” system where everything was micromanaged by one leader, the Church delegated as much authority as possible to the individual parish priests. This easily allowed the individual priests and churches to adopt to the situations that they faced, and also ensured that the destruction of the Church’s higher leadership was not as damaging as it may have otherwise been. The decision to avoid direct opposition to the Bolsheviks also allowed the Church to officially claim neutrality, and thus prevent the Bolsheviks from being able to justify their attacks on the Church, while also allowing each Christian the freedom of conscience to determine their own response to the anti-religious measures being implemented.

This raises another question, is it fair to accuse Patriarchs Tikhon and Sergei of collaborating with the Soviet government? Although many Orthodox Christians at the time believed that this was the case, the decision made by Tikhon and Sergei was consistent with Church law and they never altered Orthodox views in an effort to make them compatible with communism. Thus, they never compromised essential Orthodox beliefs as they only promised civic loyalty to the national rulers. Pospelovsky notes that it was the Bolsheviks who broke their end of the deals they made with the Church, and Fletcher states that the promises of loyalty made by the Church did allow individual churches to remain open despite the anti-religious sentiment that was expressed by the government.³²⁴ While it is impossible to accurately engage in counterfactuals, it is highly probable that the persecution would have been far worse if the Church had actively supported the regime’s enemies.

³²⁴ Pospelovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, Volume 1*, pp. 164–165 and Fletcher. *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground*, p. 59.

Bolshevik policy was also highly flawed and this also had a major role in ensuring the Church's survival. First, the Bolsheviks were blinded by their own materialistic worldview. This led them to conclude that the relationship between the Church and the people was merely one of economic exchange; the people gave the Church money, and the Church gave the people an allegedly false hope of there being a greater purpose in life. Therefore, the churches that the Church used to provide the "marketplace" for this exchange to take place were destroyed, the Church would die as well. This was proven false as the destruction of churches did not translate into a collapse of Christianity. Even if their understanding of the Church's relationship to the people was correct, the Bolsheviks were unable to exploit it due to their own actions and policies. It is true that the Orthodox Church had lost a lot of support due to its connection to the Czars and the Rasputin scandal, but it also had a reliable base of support that it never lost, particularly in the rural regions of the Soviet Union. Additionally, the Bolsheviks experienced great difficulty in acquiring support because many of their policies, such as collectivization, had alienated the people they were supposedly setting free from the Church's tyranny. The Bolsheviks had promised "peace, bread, and land", but they delivered blood, starvation, and virtual imprisonment on a collective farm, as well as a state of terror under Stalin. The Church endured its heaviest suffering during these times, yet the Soviet government was never able to "finish the job" because continuing these policies threatened to jeopardize their support from the Soviet people.

Finally, the German invasion in 1941 forced the Stalin to reintegrate the Orthodox Church as a core pillar of the Soviet State similar to how Peter the Great had done it in 1721. Just as the Orthodox Church was a closely connected to the Russian Imperial government, the Church was now an important part the Soviet war effort against the Axis. Ironically, the institution which

had been accused of treasonous activity during the Great Terror was now being portrayed as a symbol of the Soviet spirit to resist those who threatened the Motherland. The fact that Stalin was forced to rely on the Church in his hour of need is sufficient proof that the Soviet campaign against the Church was a dismal failure. Although the Russian Orthodox Church faced more communist persecution in the subsequent decades, God's Providence worked through the Church to ensure that the Christian faith was not extinguished in Russia, while also using the errors of the Soviet State and ideology to confound its attempts to replace the Church with atheistic materialism.

Bibliography

- Bolshakoff, Serge. *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of "Unofficial" Religion in Russia*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950).
- Chaillot, Christine. *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).
- Coleman, Heather J. *Orthodox Christianity in Imperial Russia: A Source Book on Lived Religion*. (Upcc Book Collections on Project Muse, Global Cultural Studies. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).
- Courtois Stéphane, and Mark Kramer. *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- Crankshaw, Edward. *The Shadow of the Winter Palace, Russia's Drift To Revolution 1825-1917*. (New York, N.Y.: The Viking Press, 1976).
- Curtiss, John Shelton. *The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917-1950, 1st Edition*. (Basic Russian Books in Western Language, Series 3, History. Boston: Little, Brown, 1953).
- Daniel, Wallace L. *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia, 1st Edition*. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2006).
- Deutscher, Isaac. *Stalin*. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1949).
- Erdozain, Dominic. *The Dangerous God: Christianity and the Soviet Experiment, 1st Edition*. (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017).
- Figes, Orlando. *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 100th Anniversary Edition*. (London: The Bodley Head, Penguin Random House UK, 2017).
- Figes, Orlando. *Revolutionary Russia. 1891-1991, A History*. (Picador, NY: A Metropolitan Book, Henry Holt and Company, 2015).
- Fletcher, William C. *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917-1970*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- Froese, Paul. *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
- Getty, J. Arch, and Oleg V Naumov. *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*. (Annals of Communism. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1999).
- House, Francis. *Millennium of Faith: Christianity in Russia, Ad 988-1988*. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988).
- Kelly, Catriona. *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularization and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988*. (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016).

- Khlevniuk O. V. *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*. Translated by Nora Seligman Favorov. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
- Lane, Christel. *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union: A Sociological Study*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978).
- Lieven, Dominic. *Nicholas II, Emperor of All the Russias*. (London: Pimlico, 1994).
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1957).
- Marx, Karl. *Critique of "Hegel's Philosophy of Right"*. Translated by Annette Jolin and Joseph O' Malley. (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Naimark, Norman M. *Stalin's Genocides*. Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).
- Peris, Daniel. *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- Pospislovsky, Dimitry. *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*. A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer, V. 1. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987).
- Pospislovsky, Dimitry. *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982 Volume 1*. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).
- Pushkarev, S. G, Vladimir Stepanov, and Yakunin Gleb. *Christianity and Government in Russia and the Soviet Union: Reflections on the Millennium*. Ccrs Series on Change in Contemporary Soviet Society. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).
- Radzinsky, Edvard. *The Last Tsar, The Life and Death of Nicholas II*. (New York, N.Y.: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1993).
- Riasanovsky, Nicholas V. *A History of Russia, 4th Edition*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
- Schaff, Philip. *The Complete Works of the Church Fathers*. (Toronto, Canada, 2016). This material is available in the public domain.
- Smolkin, Victoria. *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- Tolstoy, Leo. *A Confession*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1998).
- Tolstoy, Leo. *Resurrection*. Translated by Louise Maude. (London: Wordsworth, 2014).
- Tolstoy, Leo. *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. Translated by Constance Garnett. (Auckland, NZ: Floating Press, 2009).
- Tolstoy, Leo. *What I Believe*. Translated by Constantine Popoff. (London: Elliot Stock, 1885).

Wanner, Catherine. *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine*.
(Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012).

Wilson, A.N. *Tolstoy*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988).