

Pastoral School of Chicago and Detroit

**BREZHNEV-ERA CRITIQUES OF MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE POLICIES
VIS-À-VIS THE SOVIET STATE**

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Approval Sheet

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Abstract

During Soviet premier N.S. Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Moscow Patriarchate, the administrative body of the Russian Orthodox Church, made numerous compromises of conscience. Among these was the state-imposed distancing of priests from parish affairs at the Holy Synod meeting in 1961. The Moscow Patriarchate's quiet acceptance of the state's demands led to growing discontentment among the episcopate, clergy, and laity in the Soviet Union, and by 1965, had turned into what some scholars have treated as a full-fledged opposition movement, which allegedly threatened the Russian Orthodox Church with schism. This paper traces the immediate origins of this movement and explores the bases of the critiques of the Moscow Patriarchate's policies vis-à-vis the Soviet state. Far from constituting a unified movement, the various critics—Archbishop Ermogen (Golubev), Fr. Gleb Iakunin, Fr. Nikolai Eshliman, Fr. Aleksandr Men', Fr. Dimitrii Dudko, Fr. Vsevolod Shpiller, Hieromonk Pavel (Troitskii), Boris Talantov, A.E. Krasnov-Levitin, A.I. Solzhenitsyn, and others—came from varied backgrounds and held to a broad spectrum of political and even religious beliefs. The concerns of the critics help shed light on the aspects of Moscow Patriarchate policies that disturbed not just a handful of self-promoting dissidents or western critics far-removed from the on-the-ground reality in the USSR, but the collective conscience of the Church. While the fall of communism largely closed the door on the anti-communist dissident movement, I claim here that the concerns about the policies of the Moscow Patriarchate have not been fully addressed and, therefore, continue to cause tension and unease in the historical consciousness of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Introduction: The Issue of Church and State

At a recent conference in memory of Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov), the long-time head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations (1960-72) and spiritual father of many of the current bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev) lauded the metropolitan's accomplishments. According to Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Nikodim convinced the authorities that he was a Soviet person and posed them no threat, thereby winning their trust and paving the way for the renewal of Church cadres. In the opinion of Patriarch Kirill, if not for Metropolitan Nikodim, Patriarch Aleksii II (Ridiger) would have remained the rector of a humble parish in a provincial Estonian town. The activity many are exhibiting now, said Patriarch Kirill, was displayed only by Metropolitan Nikodim in the 1960s and 1970s and, in this way, he defined his age.¹ This glowing portrayal clashes with the one advanced by many of the metropolitan's contemporaries, who characterized him as a traitor to the Church and a Soviet agent.² The recent memoir accounts of Metropolitan Nikodim's followers cast him in a much more complex and sympathetic light, suggesting that he genuinely sought to defend the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church.³ For example, Archimandrite Iosif (Pustotov) writes,

¹ Aleksandr Burov, "Bogoslovsckoe nasledie mitropolita Nikodima," http://www.psmb.ru/aktualnoe/vse+novosti/v_rossii/statja/bogoslovsckoe-nasledie-mitropolita-nikodima [22 February 2010].

² See, for example, Vladimir Samarin, *The Triumphant Cain: An Outline of the Calvary of the Russian Church* (New York: 1972), 33-42, particularly 38 and 42.

³ See, for example, Arkhimandrit Avgustin (Nikitin), *Tserkov' plenennaia: Mitropolit Nikodim i ego Vremia* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2008). See also Arkhiepiskop Vasilii (Krivoshein), *Dve vstrechi : Mitropolit Nikolai (Iarushevich), Mitropolit Nikodim (Rotov)* (St. Petersburg: Satis, 2003). Archbishop Vasilii (Krivoshein), who had the opportunity to meet and interact with Metropolitan Nikodim on numerous occasions, is neither sympathetic nor unsympathetic and helps bring out the complexity of Metropolitan Nikodim's persona.

...[I]f during the Khrushchev years at least something was left of the Russian Church, then this was in many ways the achievement of Metropolitan Nikodim. He is also condemned for his peace efforts. But at that time, this was the only small little crack through which the Church could squeeze through to reach society. One had to make use of it. We took part in all of the ecumenical and peace forums.... Thanks to this it became apparent that the Church exists in the USSR, and the authorities could no longer quietly destroy it.⁴

This claim, though logical on the face of it, requires further historical evaluation, but the closure of thousands of churches and persecution of believers under Soviet premier N.S. Khrushchev (1956-64), despite the Patriarchate's accommodations to the Soviet state, as well as other factors that contributed to the ultimate outcome of the state's persecution of the Church—stagnation under L.I. Brezhnev and subsequent reforms under M.S. Gorbachev, bring into question the benefit of Metropolitan Nikodim's policies for the Russian Orthodox Church. This issue demands further research and exploration, but it falls beyond the scope of this paper. Here I concern myself with the criticisms of the Patriarchate's policies that came from within the bosom of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1960s and 1970s. Critics believed the Patriarchate's accommodation to the anti-religious Soviet state as morally dubious and contrary to the canons of the Orthodox Church.

The issues raised by the critics merit particular attention in light of “The Basis of the Social Concept” of the Russian Orthodox Church, drafted by the current patriarch, then-metropolitan Kirill, and adopted by the Jubilee Bishops' Council of 2000. “The Basis of the Social Concept” makes numerous statements that would seemingly bring into question the correctness of the policies of Metropolitan Nikodim and, more broadly, the

⁴ Arkhimandrit Iosif Pustotov, “Pravda o ‘sovetskikh’ mitropolitakh. Chast’ vtoraiia. Mitropolit Nikodim,” <http://www.foma.ru/article/index.php?news=3632> [22 February 2010].

Moscow Patriarchate during and after Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign. For example, the document declares that, “[i]f the authority forces Orthodox believers to apostatise from Christ and His Church and to commit sinful and spiritually harmful actions, the Church should refuse to obey the state.” [emphasis in original]⁵ While “sinful and harmful actions” are open to interpretation, one may safely assume that government-imposed church closings, the dismissal of clergy, and other regular incidences of the Khrushchev years would qualify as such. The document of the Jubilee Council presents various means by which the Church might respond when the state seeks to impose anti-Christian measures, including calling on the faithful to peaceful disobedience, appealing to international bodies, and making use of legal channels to affect the state's policies.⁶

During the early 1960s, the Moscow Patriarchate did not find it within its power to adopt any of these approaches in any kind of systematic way. Critics would claim that the Church hierarchy accepted anti-Church measures with little resistance, while defenders would say that the Church had little choice. The recent glorification of Metropolitan Nikodim's methods—a blend of political maneuvering, ostensibly in the Church's interest, and genuine loyalty to the Soviet state—and their characterization as conscious, rational, defensible, and effective complicates matters further. The tension between the two views could be resolved relatively easily by claiming that the hierarchy's accommodations constituted compromises of conscience under extraordinary pressure from the militantly atheistic government. Such was the tack taken by Patriarch

⁵ “The Basis of the Social Concept,” <http://www.mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/iii/> [26 May 2010].

⁶ Ibid.

Aleksii II—the previous patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.⁷ But the treatment of Metropolitan Nikodim’s methods as a sort of ideal clashes with the dominant Russian Orthodox images from the country’s past, spanning an entire millennium of Russian Christianity.

The relationship of some of the most revered saints canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church over the centuries to government authorities serves to demonstrate that, while the state is regarded as divinely established according to God’s providence, the Church nonetheless carries the obligation of reproaching the secular authorities when the actions of authorities clash with the Christian faith. The vita of Feodosii of the Caves, the father of monasticism in Kievan Rus’ and eleventh-century saint, one encounters the story of Prince Sviatoslav’s usurpation of the throne from his brother Iziaslav. St. Feodosii began to rebuke Sviatoslav for having unlawfully taken his brother’s throne and driven him out of his domains. On some occasions Feodosii reproached Sviatoslav in writing. Other times he did so by word of mouth, asking noblemen who visited the Kiev Caves Monastery to repeat his instructions to Sviatoslav.⁸ Finally, Sviatoslav threatened Feodosii with exile and made his wrath known, but Feodosii, according to his vita, answered:

Brothers, I am filled with joy; for indeed, nothing could be better for me in this life. What have I to fear? The loss of riches or property? Separation from country or children? We have brought nothing of the sort into this

⁷ See Metropolitan Ioann (Snychev), *Odolenie smuty: Slovo k russkomu narodu* (St. Petersburg: Tsarskoe delo, 1995), 140. Patriarch Aleksii II: “Millions of people, from the royal family to the peasants, from God’s prelates to simple monks, accepted sufferers’ deaths. Others suffered spiritual insult, bondage, the bitterness of moral compromise and the most burdensome suffering—the suffering of the soul, consciously casting itself into the abyss of evil... We know that we are unworthy. We repent before the Lord.. And from all our heart we pray: Lord, give us the strength to renew and purify ourselves! Give us spiritual zeal in serving You and Your people!”

⁸ G.P. Fedotov, ed., *The Way of the Pilgrim and Other Classics of Russian Spirituality* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003), 42.

world. We were born naked, and we must leave this world naked.
Therefore, I am prepared for exile and death.

Rather than succumbing to the pressure from Sviatoslav, Feodosii began to rebuke the prince yet more vigorously for the hatred he had for his brother.⁹ When Sviatoslav finally came to the monastery, Feodosii told him: ““Good prince, what effect can our anger have upon your power? It is our duty to rebuke you and to say whatever has a bearing upon the salvation of your soul, and it is your duty to listen.””¹⁰ Feodosii continued to commemorate Iziaslav before Sviatoslav at litanies as the Prince of Kiev.¹¹

Other examples from the lives of Russian saints throughout the centuries point to the duty of the Church to protest the lawless and morally repugnant actions of the state. In the 1560s, Metropolitan Filipp of Moscow scolded Tsar Ivan IV “the Terrible” for the terror his dreaded *oprichnina* inflicted on society. Having entered the church on the Sunday of the Cross during Great Lent, Ivan approached Metropolitan Filipp for a blessing. After declining to give Ivan a blessing three times, the metropolitan chided the tsar for his lawlessness and the shedding of blood:

Since the sun has been shining in the sky it has been unheard of that a righteous tsar would create turmoil in his own dominions... The Tatars and pagans have laws and truth, and we do not. We, our sovereign, are presenting the bloodless sacrifice [i.e. the Eucharist], while the blood of innocent Christian is spilled behind the altar. I am not sorrowful for those who, in spilling their innocent blood, become worthy of the fate of holy martyrs; I suffer for your poor soul.

Metropolitan Filipp paid for his words with exile, the extermination of numerous of his relatives (including that of his favorite nephew, who was beheaded), and eventual death

⁹ Ibid., 42-43.

¹⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹¹ Ibid., 44.

at the hands of Maliuta Skuratov, who strangled the metropolitan in his monastic cell.¹² The imperial period of Russian history (1721-1917), inaugurated by Peter I (“the Great”), who imposed his will on the Church, refusing to allow the selection of a new patriarch and establishing instead a Holy Synod, regarded within the Church is legitimate because of the approval of the Orthodox patriarchs, but nonetheless canonically defective, produced some prominent examples of non-subordination as well.¹³ To cite just one, St. Arsenii, metropolitan of Rostov, died in exile as a result of his open opposition to Catherine II’s secularization of monastery lands.¹⁴ In the Church, saints embody Christian ideals, and the canonization of individuals who refused to compromise their beliefs in the face of state pressure raises their behavior to the status of an ideal within the consciousness of the Church.

From this perspective, the religious dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s who had difficulty squaring the behavior of the Church hierarchy with their Orthodox belief can, in a sense, be seen as belonging to the mainstream of Russian Orthodox consciousness. In revisiting the critiques of the Patriarchate in the 1960s and 1970s, this paper seeks to lay the groundwork for an objective historical analysis of this period in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church.

¹² “Sviatitel’ Filipp, mitropolit moskovskii,” <http://days.pravoslavie.ru/Life/life6898.htm> [18 June 2010].

¹³ A.V. Kartashev, *Ocherki po istorii Russkoi tserkvi*, tom II (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 367, 370-71. The extent of the Church’s subservience to the Russian state is a matter of dispute, but the replacement of the patriarch by the Synod and the appointment of a layman to monitor the activities of the bishops are nearly universally perceived within the Church as a negative development, and one that was restituted at the Local Council of 1917-18.

¹⁴ “Sviashchennomuchenik Arsenii, mitropolit Rostovskii,” <http://days.pravoslavie.ru/Life/life4762.htm> [21 June 2010].

Historiography and Approach

As we shall see below, the apparent submissiveness of the Russian Orthodox hierarchs to the Soviet state in the face of persecution served as the starting point for Brezhnev-era critiques of the Moscow Patriarchate. Historians have characterized the groundswell of criticism as part of the human rights movement, grouping the Church critics with the so-called *pravozashchitniki*, or as an opposition movement that threatened the Church with schism. Nathaniel Davis, adopting the former approach, discusses the critics of the Moscow Patriarchate within the context of the human rights movement, alongside the likes of physicist A.D. Sakharov.¹⁵ He describes the human rights movement as “a seesaw battle between the emerging forces of liberty and the efforts of the KGB authorities to suppress these stirrings.”¹⁶ Meanwhile, Gerhardt Simon describes the critics as an “ecclesiastical opposition” threatening the Russian Orthodox Church with schism.¹⁷

In this paper, based on an exploration of long-forgotten and previously untapped published primary sources, as well as newly available internet materials, I propose that both approaches leave much to be desired. The former approach politicizes the actions of the critics, much in the way that the Soviet state politicized them and regarded them as “anti-Soviet.” Western observers in general, influenced by the Cold War paradigm, frequently painted the critics with a broad brush, portraying them as allies or western-style democrats. In most cases, this tendency was wishful thinking, and it imposed artificial and inaccurate categories on the individuals in question. With the fall of

¹⁵ Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary history of Russian Orthodoxy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 48-49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷ Gerhard Simon, *Church, State and Opposition in the U.S.S.R.* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1974), 85-86.

communism, Soviet political dissidents became a relic of the past—no longer useful to the West, because the all-important struggle in the name of political freedom had been won, and no longer worthy of suppression, because the new post-Soviet state was now democratic. The religious critics, whose grievances had more than just political content, and who had been thrown in one barrel with the political dissidents, were forgotten.

While some of the critics had political inclinations, and certain of them thought in terms of legal rights, they all perceived themselves—and from the perspective of the Church indeed were, members of the Orthodox Church. While their critiques varied, they all saw their actions as morally justifiable, and were not practicing politics for the sake of politics, but rather seeking to effect that they considered positive changes within the Church. Furthermore, their critiques engaged issues of Church-state relations in historical context, sometimes referencing the imperial and early Soviet periods of Russian history and, indeed, speak to broader questions of Church and state in the country's history. The methodological contribution of this paper is to view these dissidents from a “Church” perspective.

The findings in this paper also reveal that the critics did not constitute a movement, at least not in a direct sense. Letters to the Church hierarchy and the Soviet state emanated from virtually all corners of the Soviet Union, and from people of varying vocations and backgrounds. While some of the prominent Church critics associated with each other and sometimes worked together, there existed fault lines from the very start owing to conflicting ideas about the proper means of addressing the Church's problems. To some extent, these fault lines between the different “oppositionists” served as the basis for future divisions and schisms; but none of the critics professed schism as a goal.

The grievances of the Orthodox dissidents, and the tensions that they caused, never received an adequate response, and lingering contradictions remain in the Russian Orthodox Church's consciousness. The goal of this paper is not to judge the actions of any individual or group of individuals, but to present, in as objective as possible a way, the basis of the debate over the policies of the Moscow Patriarchate in the 1960s-70s, in the hope that unresolved issues can be addressed in an informed and constructive manner.

The first part of this paper outlines the shift in the Soviet state's policies toward the Russian Orthodox Church from the time of World War II to the early 1960s. The second part traces the origins of two famous letters of two Moscow priests, Fr. Gleb Iakunin and Fr. Nikolai Eshliman: one addressed to the Patriarch Aleksii and one to the Soviet state. These letters signaled the presence of opposition to the decisions of the Moscow Patriarchate within the ranks of the clergy and caused somewhat of a hubbub when they leaked out to the West.¹⁸ The third section looks at individuals who perceived the actions of the two priests to be radical but nonetheless sympathized to one or another degree with their critiques of the Moscow Patriarchate.

From Tenuous Coexistence to Renewed Assault

The late 1950s and early 1960s have entered the historiography of the Russian Orthodox Church as a period of renewed state persecution after the relative calm of the late Stalin years (1945-53).¹⁹ Khrushchev's campaign of de-Stalinization, accompanied by a modest cultural thaw and the closing of the Gulag (Main Administration of

¹⁸ See John Cogley, "2 Russian Priests Protest to Soviet," *The New York Times*, May 28, 1966, p. 14 and Dana Adams Schmidt, "Russian Assails Orthodox Church," *The New York Times*, November 27, 1966, p. 26.

¹⁹ See, for example, M.V. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' pri Staline i Khrushcheve: Gosudarstvenno-tserkovnye otnosheniia v SSSR v 1939—1964 godakh* (Moscow: Krutitskoe Patriarshee Podvor'e, Obshchestvo liubitelei tserkovnoi istorii, 1999), 359-93.

Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies), brought with it the reinvigoration of militant atheism, the proliferation of anti-religious propaganda, the rapid state-imposed closure of churches, and efforts to further subjugate the Church hierarchy to the state.²⁰ These policies can be seen as part of Khrushchev's broader effort to treat I.V. Stalin as an aberration and to return to an idealized “true” communist path, ostensibly embarked on under V.I. Lenin’s leadership during the October Revolution of 1917. After making great strides in undermining the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union prior to the start of World War II,²¹ the threat posed to the state during the Nazi invasion, perhaps coupled with the anticipated diplomatic benefits after war's end,²² impelled Stalin to establish a *modus vivendi* with the Moscow Patriarchate of the Church. In 1943, Stalin invited the three leading bishops, and the only ones with dioceses on unoccupied territory—Metropolitans Sergii (Stragorodskii), Aleksii (Simanskii), and Nikolai (Iarushevich)—to the Kremlin.²³ Stalin established a Council on the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, and helped to convene a council of bishops, most of whom were called out of the labor camps to participate. The council elected Metropolitan Sergii, who had until then held the title of *locum tenens* to the patriarchal throne, as the new patriarch. While anti-

²⁰ On the number of church closings, see Nathaniel Davis, “The Number of Orthodox Churches before and after the Khrushchev Antireligious Drive,” *Slavic Review* 50, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 612-20.

Approximately 6,000 or 40 percent of Orthodox churches in the USSR were closed down.

²¹ On the eve of Nazi invasion, ninety-seven percent of all pre-1917 churches in the Ukrainian SSR had been closed. In Kiev diocese, where there had been 1,710 churches, twenty-three monasteries, 1435 priests, 277 deacons, 1410 psalmists (*psalomchiki*) and 5193 monastic clergy, only two parishes, three priests, and two psalmists remained. In the entire Russian SFSR, approximately 100 functioning churches remained. See Archpriest Vladislav Tsypin, *Istoriia Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, 1917-1990* (Moscow: Khronika, 1994), 170. In 1917, there were 77,767 Orthodox churches in Russia. See M.I. Odintsov, “Prugatry,” *Russian Studies in History* 32, no. 2 (fall 1993), 60.

²² See Anna Dickinson, “A Marriage of Convenience? Domestic and Foreign Policy Reasons for the 1943 Soviet Church-State ‘Concordat’,” *Religion, State & Society* 28, no. 4 (2000), 337-46.

²³ See Anna Dickinson, “A Marriage of Convenience? Domestic and Foreign Policy Reasons for the 1943 Soviet Church-State ‘Concordat’,” *Religion, State & Society* 28, no. 4 (2000): 337-46. For an account of the meeting by G.G. Karpov, the first head of the newly formed Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, see Felix Corley, ed., *Religion in the Soviet Union: An Archival Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 139-47.

religious propaganda and persecution continued,²⁴ the new arrangement granted certain legitimacy to the Moscow Patriarchate, particularly in the wake of what came to be called the Great Patriotic War, in which the Church played a major role by helping mobilize the country's inhabitants in defense of the fatherland.

Khrushchev's political mission began with his speech to a closed session of the Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956, in which he denounced, among other things, Stalin's abuse of power. At the same time, the Soviet authorities began to signal a shift in their policies toward the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1957, Khrushchev's desire for society to enter into a new phase of communist development, where all survivals of communism would disappear, left no room for belief in God.²⁵ Sensing an approaching crackdown on the Church, Metropolitan Nikolai, then head of the Department of External Church Relations, departed from his policy of conformism and began to push more aggressively for the rights of the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union.²⁶ On February 16, 1960, Patriarch Aleksii delivered an address written by Metropolitan Nikolai at a disarmament conference, in which he listed the

²⁴ Examples of continued persecution are abundant, but perhaps most the most vivid evidence is the continued arrest and execution of Soviet citizens for religious activity. In 1943, 1000 clergy and lay believers were arrested and 500 executed. More than 100 were executed in each of the following three years, from 1944 to 1946. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, 395.

²⁵ Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, 360.

²⁶ In his appearances abroad, Metropolitan Nikolai sometimes toed the Communist Party line but at other times spoke frankly. In June 1956, *The New York Times* reported on the metropolitan's exclamations in the United States: "The church is not limited in religious work.... Our theological schools are filled. Even when seminaries were closed, people studied courses and received religious education in the homes of clergymen. Now the seminaries are reopened and we do not need any more seminaries. If we needed any, we could have them"; "Now relations between church and state are normal, friendly and loyal"; and "He said that all churches in Russia were 'free and independent' in religious affairs. He denied that there was any Government interference with internal church business...." See "8 Soviet Clerics En Route to U.S.," *The New York Times*, June 2, 1956, pp. 3-4 and "8 Russian Clerics Arrive for Tour," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1956, p. 1. For a departure from the Party line, see Richard H. Parke, "Russian Prelate Scores Red Tenet," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1956, p. 17. According to the article, Metropolitan Nikolai "said bluntly that his church 'rejects the teachings of Communist party materialism.'" See also, Harrison E. Salisbury, "Russian Prelate Preaches in City: Nikolai Declares His Faith in Christ and 'Holy Russia' at Church on 97th St.," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1956, p. 6.

accomplishments of the Russian Orthodox Church over centuries of the country's history, spoke in general terms about the persecution of the Church, and proclaimed that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. This speech precipitated the removal of G.G. Karpov, who was relatively sympathetic to the Church hierarchy, as head of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, the appointment of V.A. Kuroedov in his stead, and the dishonorable dismissal of Metropolitan Nikolai from the position of head of the Department of External Church Relations. Archimandrite Nikodim (Rotov) replaced Metropolitan Nikolai. On December 13, 1961, the metropolitan died in the hospital under unusual circumstances, his death being attributed to a "change of climate."²⁷

While the Khrushchev government's anti-religious policies began to take shape in the late 1950s, and the subordinate position of the Church administration vis-à-vis the state had been established long before, the July 18, 1961, Holy Synod resolution, which dramatically circumscribed the pastoral activities of parish priests, spurred dramatic criticism of the hierarchy from within the Russian Orthodox Church. The state-imposed resolution took financial and administrative control of the parish out of the hands of parish priests and turned it over to the parish council and the church wardens (*starosty*), who were frequently appointed by the local Party and state apparatus.²⁸ Local Party officials also made use of the ambiguous formulations in the resolution to limit the number of parish members to twenty, the so-called *dvadtsadka*, excluding other churchgoers from parish governance.²⁹ The compliance of the Holy Synod in instituting a policy highly detrimental to the spiritual activities of the Church on a grassroots level

²⁷ Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, 371-75.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 379.

²⁹ Simon, *Church, State and Opposition in the U.S.S.R.*, 80.

distressed clergy and lay believers alike. This alarm spurred a series of criticisms of both Soviet policies toward the Church and the Church administration for its alleged passivity, and even complicity, in Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign. The initial hushed criticisms of the Khrushchev years snowballed, and by the Brezhnev years, developed into what has been regarded in the West as a full-fledged religious dissident movement.

The Development of an “Opposition Movement” and Radical Critiques of the Moscow Patriarchate

During the summer of 1965, Archbishop Ermogen (Golubev) of Kaluga addressed a declaration, which he had written with seven other bishops, to Patriarch Aleksii. Archbishop Ermogen had by that time established a track record as a principled and unyielding bishop. During his time in Tashkent diocese, from 1953 and 1960, not one church had been closed, and from 1963 on, he had repeatedly clashed with local officials in Kaluga diocese over the appointment and registration of priests. The letter to the patriarch asked that the uncanonical decisions of the 1961 Synod of Bishops be repealed and that a Local Council be convened to address the various problems in the Church, including the interference of the state in Church matters. After having refused to renounce the declaration before the Holy Synod, Archbishop Ermogen was forcibly retired, apparently on the orders of Kuroedov, the head of the Council for Religious Affairs, and exiled to the Zhirovitsy Monastery outside of Minsk, Belorussian SSR. He appealed for reinstatement but was rebuffed by the Patriarchate on the grounds that he had caused turmoil wherever he had gone, forcing the patriarch to smooth things over and transfer him to another diocese.³⁰

³⁰ Ibid., 86-87.

In November 1965, partly in response to the removal of Archbishop Ermogen, two Moscow-area priests—Gleb Iakunin and Nikolai Eshliman—sent an open letter to Patriarch Aleksii. While the letter accused the state of breaches of Soviet legality, it also accused the Moscow Patriarchate of “cowardly evasion of duty, failure to resist church closures, abolition of seminaries and parishes, and of exposing the faithful to persecution by handing over to the Government lists of those who received baptismal and other sacraments.”³¹

On December 15, 1965, the priests directed a letter of protest to N.V. Podgorny, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and copies to other prominent state officials. The authors of the appeal cited three items of legislation that defined the relationship between Church and state in the USSR: the decree “On the Separation of Church and State” of 1928, article 124 of the Constitution of the USSR, and the decree “On Religious Associations” of 1929. According to the priests, these documents assured the freedom of worship and state non-interference into Church matters. Playing on Khrushchev’s fall from grace among the Soviet government elite, Iakunin and Eshliman claimed that during Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign, the Council of Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church had been transformed from “an official organ of arbitration to...[an] illegal organ of control over the Moscow Patriarchate.”³² In short, Soviet policies came into conflict with official legislation. The authors proceed to list, and describe in some detail, eight categories of the state’s breaches of its own legislation: 1) the registration (and resulting appointment, transfer, and dismissal) of clergy, 2) mass

³¹ Dana Adams Schmidt, “Russian Assails Orthodox Church,” *The New York Times*, November 27, 1966, p. 26. The full letter can be found in Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 194-221.

³² Nikita Struve, trans. Lancelot Sheppard and A Manson, *Christians in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967), 405.

closings of churches and monasteries, 3) registration of baptism and other religious rites, 4) restrictions on the religious practice of religious associations, 5) the violation of freedom of conscience with respect to children, 6) administrative interference in the financial affairs of church communities, 7) the limitation of the number of members of a religious society to twenty, and 8) the limitation of the number of clergy and consequent inhibition of religious rites.³³ Iakunin and Eshliman asserted that the breach of Soviet law led “to warranted dissatisfaction of the believing citizens of the USSR,” and discredited “in the eyes of the broad public the rightful foundations of socialist society, thereby causing great harm to [the] Fatherland.”³⁴ They demanded that the activities of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church be condemned and legality be restored, including the return of churches and monasteries, and the re-opening of the Church’s educational institutions.

This document, intended to defend the ROC against the state, left the hierarchy with two choices: to openly support the declaration and suffer the consequences from the state or support the state in denouncing the declaration. While it appears that the Church administration tried to string things out, ultimately, on May 13, 1966, after having unsuccessfully attempted to extract a recantation, Patriarch Aleksii banned the two priests.³⁵

On the surface, the grievances of Archbishop Ermogen and the two priests seem rather similar. Indeed, in the early 1960s, the two priests, along with Fr. Dimitrii Dudko and Fr. Aleksandr Men’, belonged to a small theological circle, initiated on the initiative of Men’. On occasion, the group of priests met with Archbishop Ermogen, and they

³³ Ibid., 405-14.

³⁴ Ibid., 416.

³⁵ Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 226-27.

regarded him as their spiritual guide.³⁶ Both letters pointed to breaches of Soviet legality and of the canons of the Orthodox Church, and both sought to bring relations between Church and state in line with Soviet laws and Orthodox canons. But the methods of achieving these ends differed, and the form which each took was consequential. Archbishop Ermogen sought to address the Church hierarchy privately, maintaining respect for the patriarch. The priests took aim at the patriarch and his closest associates in a public manner, through an open letter, seeking to mobilize grassroots support for their cause. According to Priest Georgii Edel'shtein, he and publicist A.E. Krasnov-Levitin both took part in composing the letter, and originally, the document was supposed to have many signatures from among the priesthood and episcopate.³⁷ It is likely that the form of the letter scared off potential signatories, because public criticism of the patriarch and Holy Synod by bishops and priest could, first, become a source of temptation for the flock, and, second, lead to retribution from the state.

Despite this, Iakunin and Eshliman's appeal resonated with many of the clergy and believers, who tended to view the open letter as a courageous act. Writing in 1970, Priest Aleksandr Men' claimed that most believers familiar with the open letter were enthralled by it, and that many bishops and priests supported it in principle.³⁸ Archbishop Ermogen support the ideas of the priests in principle. Even theologically conservative clergy, like

³⁶ Men', "Vospominaniia," http://www.krotov.info/library/13_m/myen/00035.html [25 May 2010].

³⁷ "Otkrytoe pis'mo Sviateishemu Patriarkhu sviashchennikov Nikolaia Eshlimana i Gleba Iakunina," <http://www.krotov.info/acts/20/1960/19651125.html> [23 May 2010]. According to Fr. Aleksandr Men', Levitin-Krasnov, Fr. Sergii Khokhlov, Fr. Nikolai Eshliman, Fr. Gleb Iakunin, Fr. Nikolai Vedernikov, Fr. Dimitrii Dudko, Fr. Aleksei Zlobin, Fr. Vladimir Timakov, and he himself participated in the initial discussions about writing a letter against the decisions of the Synod of 1961. Men' and Dudko opposed sending a letter without the participation of a bishop. Levitin-Krasnov appears to have been the most radical and the motor behind the operation. He made up the first draft of the letter. See Men', "Vospominaniia," http://www.krotov.info/library/13_m/myen/00035.html [25 May 2010].

³⁸ Aleksandr Men', "Neskol'ko slov o dele dvukh moskovskikh sviashchennikov," http://www.krotov.info/library/13_m/myen/2_1970eshl.html [25 May 2010].

Fr. Vsevolod Shpiller and Hieromonk Pavel (Troitskii), whose views will be examined in more detail later in the paper, regarded the initial letter as praise-worthy for its truthfulness.³⁹

Yet the differences between the methods of Archbishop Ermogen and Iakunin and Eshliman were not negligible, and to claim that they constituted representatives of a common movement do not withstand scrutiny. Gerhard Simon writes:

At least one prelate, Yermogen (Golubev) of Kaluga, has joined the critics who reproach the official Church with its unresisting surrender to the new Soviet attacks. This greatly increased the danger of a schism because, even in the case of a split from the patriarchal Church, the apostolic succession could have been maintained.⁴⁰

But Iakunin himself recently admitted that his efforts to recruit Iakunin as a leader of a resistance movement failed because Archbishop Ermogen found the means employed by Iakunin unacceptable:

The main purpose of our meetings with Bishop Ermogen was to attempt to convince him to head an opposition movement in the Russian Orthodox Church, to make it broader and more presentable. Unfortunately—as he admitted to me during one of our meetings—he considered me and Eshliman, along with our friends, too ‘radical.’ He said that he respected the path taken by Aleksandr Men’. [Men’] wanted to act within the confines of the Moscow Patriarchate.⁴¹

³⁹ Hieromonk Pavel (Troitskii) to Fr. Vsevolod Shpiller, 1 March 1974, <http://www.enisey.h1.ru/sp.htm> [12 May 2010]. There is even anecdotal evidence that Patriarch Aleksii greeted the letter as a breath of fresh air in terms of its honesty. Men’, “Vospominaniia,” http://www.krotov.info/library/13_m/myen/00035.html [25 May 2010].

⁴⁰ Simon, *Church, State and Opposition*, 86.

⁴¹ “Interv’iu: Klirik Apostol’skoi tserkvi o. Gleb Iakunin : ‘Pozhelanie nyneshnego Patriarkha, vyskazannoe 40 let nazad arkhiepiskopu Ermogenu ‘steret’ i izgladit’’ ego velikoe delo, - nikogda ne ispolnitsia’. Nekotorye uroki noveishei istorii,” <http://www.evangelie.ru/forum/t44242.html> [17 March 2010]. The article originally appeared on www.portal-credo.ru but appears to no longer be available at that site.

Fr. Aleksandr Men', who found the courage of the two priests laudable, believed the letter itself too harsh and condemnatory of the patriarch,⁴² and in his reminiscences, he disapprovingly characterizes the position of the authors as extreme.⁴³ Fr. Alexander also claims that being a dissident or Church oppositionist translates to being a schismatic.⁴⁴ This is so because to be a dissident, one must reject the hierarchical principle of government in the Church, which in itself has a theological and not only practical basis.

However, the two priests' less rigid conception of the hierarchical principle does not in itself imply that they desired schism, and other factors played a role in their gradual radicalization. In the wake of the letters and the subsequent banning of the priests, Krasnov-Levitin, who participated in drafting the project and was even more radical in his stance vis-à-vis the Patriarchate, wrote: "With my hand on my heart, as Almighty God as my witness, I declare that neither I, nor any of the people who think like me, wants schism. I think that it is desired least of all by the priests who wrote the petition; they are god-fearing, submissive, obedient sons of the church."⁴⁵ But the priests, as well as Krasnov-Levitin, wanted unity on their own terms. Krasnov-Levitin indicated two potential paths of development: one would be the path of dialogue and the smoothing over of differences, and the other would be continuing efforts to silence the voices of the critics. He believed that the latter variant would lead to schism, but it would be a schism of the Moscow Patriarchate's own making.⁴⁶

⁴² Aleksandr Men', "Neskol'ko slov o dele dvukh moskovskikh sviashchennikov," http://www.krotov.info/library/13_m/myen/2_1970eshl.html [25 May 2010].

⁴³ See Men', "Vospominaniia," http://www.krotov.info/library/13_m/myen/00035.html [25 May 2010].

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 286.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 288.

While the priests' relative disregard for the hierarchical principle of Church governance and order earned them banning, and perhaps justifiably so from a canonical perspective, the Moscow Patriarchate's seeming lack of concern for the priests and their spiritual well-being contributed to their radicalization. One cannot help but wonder if the deepening politicization of Fr. Gleb Iakunin's stance—in 1976, he established the Christian Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Believers in the USSR and truly became a *pravozashchitnik* in his worldview—could have been averted had the hierarchy attempted to carry on some form of dialogue or focused on instruction rather than punishment. The tragedy of Fr. Nikolai Eshliman, who by all accounts had been an optimistic and vibrant individual, provides further support for this point. After his banning, Fr. Nikolai became somewhat of a recluse, retreating from his old friends, suffering emotionally, and avoiding discussion of Church matters until his death. Previously, he deeply respected Metropolitan Pimen (Izvekov), had friendly relations with him, and was presented as a candidate for ordination by the metropolitan, but the letters drove a wedge between the two.⁴⁷ The hierarchical position taken by the Moscow Patriarchate was also extreme but at the opposite end of the spectrum. The Synod banned the priests without any formal investigation of the matter. The state's demands unquestionably conditioned the reaction of the Patriarchate, limiting its flexibility, but this again raises the question of the tragic consequences of submissiveness toward the state. Krasnov-Levitin explained that, though he and his associates did not desire schism, they believed that the denial of “the right to criticize the obviously disastrous actions of the princes of the church [i.e. the bishops], actions which constitute direct perversion of

⁴⁷ See Men', “Vospominaniia,” http://www.krotov.info/library/13_m/myen/00035.html [25 May 2010].

all ecclesiastical and canonical practice (and all of this, allegedly, for the sake of the peace of the church)” was like proposing “suicide for fear of death.”⁴⁸

Ideas foreign to Orthodoxy clearly influenced Fr. Gleb, Fr. Nikolai, and some of their close associates in a tangible way, and there exists abundant evidence to demonstrate their faltering Orthodoxy in terms of beliefs, if not self-identification, but to discredit their message on the basis of their subsequent actions and deepening radicalization after 1965 would be tendentious and unhistorical. Shortly before sending the two letters, the priests became close with F. Karelin, who though formally Orthodox, had strong leanings toward non-Orthodox mysticism and apparently perceived himself as a prophet. When Metropolitan Pimen called on the authors of the letter to the patriarch to clarify their position and apologize to the bishops for offending them, Karelin successfully lobbied the priests to sustain an unyielding position. After their banning, out of anger and in a desire to justify their actions, they hardened their anti-hierarchical stance and turned down the opportunity to meet with Metropolitan Nikodim. Their hatred for the individuals in the Patriarchate further undermined in them the principle of Church governance, and by extension, the Orthodox understanding of the Church. In 1966-67, Fr. Gleb and Fr. Nikolai descended into that Fr. Alexander Men’ characterizes as “pathological fanaticism” and growing apocalypticism. They gathered to interpret the Scriptures, particularly Revelation and Old Testament prophecies, but did so on the basis of numerology and symbolism, not the Church fathers or tradition. One of the members of the group and future partner of Fr. Gleb in the Christian Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Believers, Lev Regel’s son, announced to Fr. Aleksandr Men’ that the Karelin group now belonged to a new Church, seemingly completing the departure from

⁴⁸ Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 286.

Orthodoxy. Soon thereafter, in 1968, Karelin instigated an apocalyptic scare and his group retreated for a time to Novyi Afon (New Athos) on the shores of the Black Sea to await the end of times.⁴⁹

Conservative and Apolitical Critiques of the Moscow Patriarchate

It could be tempting for some to discredit the message by discrediting the source, to say that Fathers Gleb and Nikolai were renegades and lacked Orthodox understanding from the start, and that their critiques of the hierarchy were thus illegitimate. But criticism of the Moscow Patriarchate's policies vis-à-vis the Soviet state also came from well-respected churchmen whose Orthodoxy is unassailable. Above, we read about the grievances voiced by Archbishop Ermogen, who endured exile for his views, of the sympathy that the letters aroused among the clergy, and of the participation of Fr. Dimitrii Dudko and Fr. Aleksandr Men' in the initial discussions that gave rise to the letters—both of whom had significant followings among the Russian Orthodox laity. To this list we can add two priests, both former White Army officers: Hieromonk Pavel (Troitskii) and Archpriest Vsevolod Shpiller. The details of Hieromonk Pavel's life are shrouded in mystery, but we know that was for a time a monk at Moscow's Danilov Monastery, had gone through the gulag, and by the 1970s was the spiritual father of Fr. Vsevolod Shpiller. By contrast, the details of Fr. Vsevolod's biography are rather well documented. Fr. Vsevolod was born in Kiev in 1902, participated in the Russian Civil War as a member of the Volunteer Army, and in 1921, after the White defeat, evacuated

⁴⁹ See Men', "Vospominaniia," http://www.krotov.info/library/13_m/myen/00035.html [25 May 2010]. For an alternate version of the events, largely consistent with the account of Fr. Aleksandr Men', see Lev Regel'son, "Moi otvet o. Aleksandru Meniu," Christian Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Believers [25 May 2010].

to Bulgaria through Constantinople. After his ordination to the priesthood in 1934, Fr. Vsevolod served first in Pazardzhik and then in Sofia. In 1950, he returned to the Soviet Union and, after a short while, became the rector of Nikolo-Kuznetsk parish in Moscow, where he quickly became a popular spiritual father. Members of the intelligentsia flocked to his church to hear his sermons; in the 1960s, the state unsuccessfully targeted him for removal from the parish.

The views of Fathers Pavel and Vsevolod are accessible to us through the letters of the former to the latter during the 1970s and early 1980s. Fr. Vsevolod also wrote in response to A.I. Solzhenitsyn's "Lenten Letter" to Patriarch Pimen in 1972, in which the political dissident author echoed many of the grievances and accusations voiced by Iakunin and Eshliman in 1965 in their open letter to Patriarch Aleksii. While the vast majority of the correspondence is devoted to purely pastoral matters, in their totality, the letters reveal significant concern over the actions of the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate and a keen awareness that, given the dominant position of the state, the hierarchs had a limited range of options.⁵⁰

References to Patriarch Pimen, the Synod, and individual hierarchs are relatively few and sometimes abstract, but they nonetheless testify to the concerns Frs. Pavel and Vsevolod felt about the administration of the Russian Orthodox Church. In October 1971, Fr. Pavel wrote: "The patriarch is in a golden cage. He now understands everything, but it is too late." In the same letter he approved of Fr. Vsevolod's decision not to go to Zagorsk (Trinity-Sergius Monastery) for church services. Based on the accounts of his acquaintances, he claimed that Kuroedov attended instead of the

⁵⁰ "O. Vsevolod Shpiller—zhizn' v sokhranivshikhsia pis'makh," <http://www.enisey.h1.ru/sp.htm> [13 March 2010].

patriarch, that Metropolitans Nikodim and Filaret (Denisenko) conducted “the most inappropriate conversations,” and that the whole situation understandably upset “true believers.” He added, “For now, we can serve with everyone,” not excluding the possibility of a future cessation of Eucharistic relations. In a letter dated September 19, 1973, Hieromonk Pavel referred to the gospel, comparing the Synod to the owners of the pigs who asked that Christ depart from them. In the same letter, he bemoaned the inability of Fr. Ioann Meiendorff and Fr. Aleksandr Shmemann (of the Orthodox Church in America) to understand the problems afflicting the Church in the Soviet Union. On December 19, 1973, the hiermonk warned Fr. Vsevolod that while the likes of Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn were in principle correct in their declarations, “dark forces” stood behind them. He again approved of Fr. Vsevolod’s decision not to attend festivities in Zagorsk, because closeness to the inner circles of the Patriarchate could lead to Fr. Vsevolod being sent abroad, and being forced to parrot the “lies (*brekhnia*) of the metropolitans.” According to Hieromonk Pavel, Fr. Vsevolod would never comply in such a situation. In the meantime, the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate had become impossible to read according to the hiermonk. On March 1, 1974, Hieromonk Pavel expressed frustration over the inability of those abroad to understand the Church situation in the Soviet Union. He asserted that all of the bishop-administrators were lackeys of the state, beginning with the patriarch, but that the people nonetheless loved them. With time, the hiermonk began to see chinks in Solzhenitsyn’s armor: while much of what he said was true, love was absent from his writings. Subsequent letters expressed displeasure over Solzhenitsyn’s evident hatred, vainglory, and politicking. “A Christian,” he wrote, “is not a politician.” In 1976, the hiermonk stated with disappointment that

Patriarch Pimen, the metropolitans, and archbishops were merely executing the plans of Kuroedov and expressed dismay over the behavior of Metropolitan Nikodim.⁵¹

Fr. Vsevolod's reactions to Solzhenitsyn's Lenten epistle echoed many of the sentiments expressed by Hieromonk Pavel in their correspondence. On February 18, 1974, in an interview with a correspondent of APN, the Soviet news agency, Fr. Vsevolod expressed the idea that, for Christians, truth and falsehood, good and evil, are more than just ethical or moral principles. The roots of these things can only be fully understood on a spiritual and metaphysical level, and Solzhenitsyn, despite his genuine striving for truth, failed to grasp this depth of understanding. The struggle between good and evil is first and foremost a spiritual one. Evil can only be overcome through its opposite, which is truth, and truth is revealed to a person only in love and through love. Solzhenitsyn's spiritual downfall, according to Fr. Vsevolod, stemmed from his maniacal confidence in his rightness in everything. By implication, the answer to the problems was to be found not in prideful accusations against the Church but in co-suffering. According to Fr. Vsevolod, Solzhenitsyn, like many of his contemporaries, failed to understand the essence of the Church. According to Archpriest Vsevolod, Solzhenitsyn regarded the sacraments as something of secondary importance.⁵² Shpillar expanded on this point in a letter to Fr. Ioann Meiendorff. He wrote that the Russian Orthodox Church holds the barrel with the chrism that anoints millions of believers, and that at the bottom of the barrel there are a few rats, but you do not have to be Blessed Ksenia—referring to

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵²“Interv'iu o. Vsevoloda Shpillera , dannoe korrespondentu sovetskogo Agentstva Pechati Novostei,” http://solzhenicyn.ru/modules/pages/Otec_Vsevolod_SHpillar.html [25 May 2010].

the St. Petersburg holy woman, and now canonized saint—not to overturn the barrel of chrism, as Solzhenitsyn had done.⁵³

In the wake of Fr. Vsevolod's comments about Solzhenitsyn's political activity, various dissidents assaulted him with a string of accusatory letters, demanding that he recant his statements. On May 7, 1974, M. Agurskii, prominent dissident and participant of the Zionist movement, demanded that Fr. Vsevolod repent of his "sins," promising him that a public recantation would win him many more friends and genuine riches. On the same day, Fr. Vsevolod received a letter from Fr. Gleb Iakunin. In the letter, Fr. Gleb accused Fr. Vsevolod of acting at the request of the powers that be, claiming that Fr. Vsevolod had long held to a contradictory position on the matter of Church politics, and that he had finally revealed himself to be in the wrong camp. On May 29, Agurskii wrote again Fr. Vsevolod. This time, he introduced the idea that the text of the statement on Solzhenitsyn may have been falsified and asks Fr. Vsevolod to make a public statement to that effect. Refusal to do so would result in further public attacks on the priest. On June 1, Fr. Vsevolod received a letter from Levitin-Krasnov with a published critique of his statement on Solzhenitsyn enclosed.⁵⁴

In August 1974, a number of apologies came in, from Agurskii, and Krasnov-Levitin, possibly under the influence of Fr. Dimitrii Dudko. Levitin-Krasnov wrote in an effort to smooth over the previous letter and assure Fr. Vsevolod that their differences were tactical and not a matter of principle. Agurskii wrote expressing his regret for having assumed the position of judge over Orthodox clergy and asking forgiveness for his rudeness. A month later, he published a declaration abroad, softening his stance

⁵³ "O. Vsevolod Shpiller—zhizn' v sokhranivshikhsia pis'makh," <http://www.enisey.h1.ru/sp.htm> [13 March 2010].

⁵⁴ Ibid.

against Fr. Vsevolod in line with a previously published article by Krasnov-Levitin. He characterized himself and Fr. Vsevolod as belonging to two different currents within Orthodoxy: one activist and the other sacramental and otherworldly.⁵⁵

While they sought reconciliation, the dissidents' campaign of intimidation against Fr. Vsevolod reveals a concrete disconnect between the radical oppositionists and the more conservative Orthodox critics of Moscow Patriarchate policies. The radical critics regarded political means as acceptable in the struggle against falsehood. Based on their antagonistic tone against Fr. Vsevolod, it appears they acted largely out of emotion and with the conviction that dubious means, when harnessed for the right purpose, can be fully acceptable. Archpriest Vsevolod's criticism of Solzhenitsyn could be applied even more vigorously to the likes of Agurskii, Krasnov-Levitin, and Fr. Gleb Iakunin. Frs. Vsevolod and Pavel clearly found the Patriarchate's subservience to the Soviet state just as upsetting as did the more radical critics, but they found the methods of the radicals hypocritical and unacceptable for Christians. In other words, the apolitical conservatives and their more radical counterparts diverged not in their evaluation of the actions of the hierarchy but in the underlying beliefs that dictated the expression of their discontent.

The Politics of the Hierarchy versus the Politics of the Rank-and-File

In August 1966, a group of twelve believers from Kirov diocese sent a letter to Patriarch Aleksii, informing him of the corrupt actions of their bishop, Ioann, and pleaded for his removal. A representative of the Patriarchate declined the request on the basis that the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church opposed such a change. In

⁵⁵ Ibid.

November, schoolteacher Boris Talantov, one of the twelve believers, wrote again to the patriarch with an exposé of the illegal actions of Soviet officials against the Church and of the connivance of bishops in closing churches and imposing various restrictions on religious practice.⁵⁶

Soon after the original letter from the Kirov believers appeared in print in Paris, Metropolitan Nikodim traveled to London, where the press asked him about the letter.

He gave the following statement:

I am prepared to swear to you here that this letter does not exist in the original. As the Patriarchate we have a type-written copy of it, but there isn't a single signature. It's quite clear, then, that it's unsigned—it's an anonymous letter. Therefore I would like to take this opportunity of requesting you gentlemen of the press not to place too much trust in anonymous letters.⁵⁷

Since the letter was typewritten, the names and addresses of the believers appeared in typeset at the end of the document. But according to Boris Talantov, it also bore the signatures of the authors. Talantov reacted violently to Metropolitan Nikodim's claim in a letter to Patriarch Aleksii: "Metropolitan Nikodim's assertion...is a shameless lie.... But Metropolitan Nikodim, like all the atheists, disregards the words of the Saviour."⁵⁸ Talantov was subsequently placed in prison by the authorities, where he died without having recanted his statements.

In this brief episode, we see much of the tragedy of the situation in the Soviet Union in the 1960s-70s. While Talantov can be accused of breaching the hierarchical principle of governance in the Church, as well as allowing his emotions to get the better of him, making the same mistake as Solzhenitsyn—if we are to apply the standards set by

⁵⁶ Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 125-53.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 152-53.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

Fr. Vsevolod Shpillar—it is tremendously difficult to defend the actions of the metropolitan. Recent revelations about Metropolitan Nikodim make it even harder to make sense of his actions. Had false statements and submissiveness been a product of human frailty, in the manner interpreted by Patriarch Aleksii II, the matter could be quickly forgiven and forgotten. But Metropolitan Nikodim appears to have consciously adopted political tactics and morally dubious means of winning respect and standing for the Church. By deciding to fight the anti-religious campaign from the inside, Metropolitan Nikodim placed himself in the unenviable position of maneuvering while accepting the Soviet terms of the discourse and giving the external impression of being a traitor to the persecuted believers. Furthermore, his methods do not stand up to the objective standard of politics vs. Christianity as articulated by Fr. Vsevolod Shpillar. For this reason, the dismissal of critiques of the Orthodox dissidents as being un-Orthodox demand an equally rigorous stance toward those bishops who adopted political means of achieving ends they saw as desirable for the Church.

As Metropolitan Vladimir (Kotliarov) of St. Petersburg recently pointed out, two patriarchs, Aleksii II and Kirill, spent their formative years interacting with Metropolitan Nikodim.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the influence of his policies should not be underestimated. Meanwhile, the glorification of the means adopted by Metropolitan Nikodim, touched upon in the introduction of this paper, reopens a chapter in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church that the fall of communism had seemingly closed but needs to be addressed.

⁵⁹ Aleksandr Burov, “Bogoslovskoe nasledie mitropolita Nikodima,” http://www.psemb.ru/aktualnoe/vse+novosti/v_rossii/statja/bogoslovskoe-nasledie-mitropolita-nikodima [22 February 2010].

Conclusion

All of the critics of the Moscow Patriarchate's policies in the 1960s and 1970s had in common that they found the Church's subservience to the militantly atheistic Soviet state distasteful. But the underpinnings of the critiques varied significantly. The position of Frs. Gleb Iakunin and Nikolai Eshliman became more radical after the Moscow Patriarchate failed to address the abnormal relations between Church and state. Although the radical critics of the Patriarchate's policies strayed further and further from an Orthodox perspective on the matter, their concerns were shared by those whose Orthodoxy was unquestionable. Whereas criticisms of the Moscow Patriarchate usually associated with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (which lacked full knowledge of the true state of affairs) or the dissidents (who have been branded as politicians in Church society), can be easily dismissed in current Church circles, it is far harder to ignore conservative and well-respected Russian Orthodox priests, such as Archpriest Vsevolod Shpillar and Hieromonk Pavel (Troitskii). Indeed, the standard set by Fr. Vsevolod provides the potential basis for an even and productive evaluation of the critiques of the hierarchy's actions, as well as of the methods of the hierarchy itself. Such an approach could go a long way in making sense of the events of the 1960s and 1970s and, in a more general sense, reconciling divergent views currently uncomfortably coexisting within the Russian Orthodox historical consciousness.

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Vita

On December 18, 1976, I was born at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Until the age of four I lived in Roslindale, Massachusetts, when my parents decided to move to Westwood. I attended Westwood Public Schools and graduated from Westwood High in 1994. I then enrolled at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, where in 1998 I received my Bachelor of Arts in Biology with a minor in Russian. In 1996, during my junior year, at the request of the rector of Holy Epiphany parish in Roslindale Fr. Roman Lukianov, I was tonsured a reader by Bishop Mitrofan of Boston. In 2000, I received my Masters in History from Boston College. In 2001, I married my wife, Michelle (Chaplain), and moved from Massachusetts to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and entered the PhD program in History at UNC - Chapel Hill. In 2003, again at the request of Fr. Roman, I was ordained a subdeacon by Metropolitan Lavr of Eastern America and New York. In 2006, after conducting research in Moscow archives, I successfully defended my dissertation on the post-World-War-II Soviet famine. Over the last four years, I have taught history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, Virginia, and finally the College of the Holy Cross. I have taught Western and European Civilization, Europe from the Renaissance to Napoleon and from Napoleon to the European Union, Imperial Russia, 20th Century Russia, Comparative Famine and Social Crisis, and Religion in Modern Russia. My wife and I have two sons: George, who is 8, and Alexei, who is 5. We currently reside in Westwood, Massachusetts.