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PERSPECTIVES ON THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN SOVIET TIMES

by Igor Pochoshajew

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Interpretation of recent history is a huge task that Russia has still to complete. Aleksandr Men', a Russian-Orthodox priest murdered in 1995,¹ regarded examination of the past a necessary condition to build the future.² There have not been many efforts spent on this task yet. Of course, there would be different issues to explore and various methods to approach the questions. The history of the Russian-Orthodox Church is surely one of the issues to explore, but I do not know any analyses devoted to it. It is not my intention here to write a history of the Russian Orthodox Church in Soviet times; many comprehensive studies on this issue have been published.³ Not much could be added to what has been already written. But with archives becoming accessible after Perestroika, some additional material concerning the period after the revolution of 1917 can be studied to complete our knowledge

¹ There has not been much research done so far on this Russian thinker with growing popularity in the West. Studies in German: Fairy von Lilienfeld, 'Erzpriester Aleksandr Meñ (1935-1990)', in: Karl Christian Felmy et al. (eds.), *Kirchen im Kontext unterschiedlicher Kulturen. Auf dem Weg in das dritte Jahrtausend*, (Göttingen 1991), 17-37. I also refer to my recently published book: Igor Pochoshajew, *Stellen wir die Altäre auf... Aleksandr Men' zum Verhältnis von Kirche und Staat*, and my article: 'Die Einheit der Christen im Denken von Aleksandr Men''. Studies in English: Michael A. Meerson, 'The Life and Work of Father Aleksandr Men'', in: Stephen K. Batalden (ed.), *Seeking God : The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*, (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1993), 13-28. Elizabeth Roberts and Ann Shukman, *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century: The Life and Work of Alexander Men*, (London 1996). Studies in French: Yves Hamant, *Alexandre Men: un témoin pour la Russie de ce temps*, (Paris 1993); 'Liminaire', in: *Plamia*: Bulletin publié en collaboration avec le Centre d'Études Russes Saint-Georges, 80 (1991) 1, 3-6.

² Aleksandr Men', 'Vom „geistigen Defizit“ in der Gesellschaft', in: *Osteuropa* 42 (1992) 1, A 25 – A 28, p. A 26; Cf. Aleksandr Men', 'Interv'ü na slučaj aresta', in: Aleksandr Men', *Kul'tura i duhovnoe voshhoždenie*, (Moskva 1992), 356-363, p. 363.

³ Here some books written from very different perspectives: Kathrin Behrens, *Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche: Segen für die »neuen Zaren«?*, (Paderborn, 2002 [München, Univ., Diss., 2000]). Otto Luchterhandt, *Der Sowjetstaat und die Russisch-Orthodoxe Kirche. Eine rechtshistorische und rechtssystematische Untersuchung*, (Köln, 1976, Abhandlungen des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, 30). Pitirim, Metropolit von Volokolamsk und Juriev (ed.), *Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche*, (Berlin/New York, 1988), 56-124.

about the destiny of the Russian-Orthodox Church in this particularly obscure and difficult time.⁴

My objective in this paper is to explore three genres of interpretations of history of the Orthodox Church: 1. The official view of the Russian Orthodox Church about its history consisting of declarations made by the Orthodox hierarchs during the Soviet time and during *Perestroika*, as well as the most recent church position on this question. The comparison will allow us to explore the question of whether there have been any significant changes in the interpretation given by the Church itself. 2. The interpretation of Alexander Men', who is currently becoming one of the most influential Orthodox thinkers based on his works. And 3. Interpretations presented in textbooks, as they allow evaluating the views that the next generations will likely hold.⁵ In the beginning it will, however, be necessary to give a short historical overview.

Some months after the October Revolution, the new Bolshevik government declared the separation between church and state by a decree on 23rd January 1918. The decree forbade religious teaching in public and private schools. Churches and religious societies were not allowed to own property. The possessions of the Russian Orthodox Church were confiscated.⁶ The new constitution of 1918 confirmed the separation between church and state, and granted freedom of religious and antireligious propaganda to all citizens. The constitution practically excluded clergymen and monks of all religions from political life by denying them the right to vote and to be elected.⁷ The new government did not limit itself to legal matters, but decided to start a broad antireligious propaganda.⁸

The theoretical base for these measures was laid out by the leader of the communist revolution in Russia, Lenin, in two of his programmatic scripts: "Socialism and Religion"⁹ and "On the Relationship of Working Class with Religion."¹⁰ Being a historic materialist

⁴ It is what I have tried to do exploring the recently published volumes, which contain documentation concerning Patriarch Tikhon: M.E., Gubonin (ed.), *Akty svjatejšego Tihona, patriarha moskovskogo i vsej Rossii*, Moskva 1994; *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tihona. Sbornik dokumentov*, (Moskva, 2000). My own research results are upcoming: Igor Pochoshajew, 'Patriarch Tichon und die Sowjetmacht', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung* 124 (2007).

⁵ My assessment relies on methodical reflections of the analyses, which studied the image of Christianity in schoolbooks of Islamic countries: Klaus Hock/ Johannes Lähnemann (eds.), *Die Darstellung des Christentums in Schulbüchern islamisch geprägter Länder*. Wolfram Reiss, Teil 1: *Ägypten und Palästina*, Schenefeld 2005, 23.

⁶ Peter Hauptmann/ Gerd Stricker (eds.), *Die Orthodoxe Kirche in Russland. Dokumente ihrer Geschichte (860-1980)*, (Göttingen, 1988), 648-649, text 217.

⁷ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 657, text 223.

⁸ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 664, text 230.

⁹ Wladimir Lenin, 'Sozialismus und Religion', in: Wladimir Lenin, *Über die Religion. Eine Sammlung ausgewählter Aufsätze und Reden*, (Berlin 1960).

¹⁰ Wladimir Lenin, 'Über das Verhältnis der Arbeiterpartei zur Religion', in: Lenin, *op.cit.*

Lenin conceived of religion as a product of social conditions. According to him, the lower social classes needed religion to express their helplessness in the current economic situation.¹¹ For a political party that intends to change social conditions and to improve the economic situation of the masses, religion must be neutral. Religion is regarded as socially harmful as it stabilizes and legitimizes ideologically unjust social conditions and economic structures.¹² It is why, according to Lenin, it is necessary to combat religion. As to the weapons, Lenin was of the opinion that they have to be spiritual, such as articles, books, and media. Lenin demanded that a future communist state in Russia introduce a strict and consequent separation between state and religion.¹³ Being anxious at the same time to avoid repeating the error of German Social Democrats, Lenin emphasized that antireligious struggle cannot be limited to antireligious propaganda, but social conditions need to be changed first of all.¹⁴ Lenin believed that, when the social basis of religion is removed, religion will simply disappear.¹⁵ History proved that he was wrong.

Lenin's view of religion and his demands concerning religious legislation have two methodological consequences. Firstly, seen from a formal juridical perspective, an antireligious persecution has never taken place in Russia.¹⁶ Secondly, as Lenin's theory concerning the disappearance of religion did not work totally, there were various attempts of different degrees of cruelty to adapt reality to this theory. The darkest period in this respect and the bloodiest time for the Orthodox Church was the years after the October Revolution of 1917. To elucidate this period it is helpful to differentiate between the Russian population in general, the simple clergymen of the Orthodox Church, and the high clergy and Patriarch Tikhon.¹⁷

This period is particularly dark not only for moral but also for methodological reasons. Neither were documents preserved nor archives established which would contain lists of people executed during this time. It is evident that entire social classes were extirpated by the new rulers. According to Vladimir Solouchin, who examined literary sources,

¹¹ Ibid., 24.

¹² Wladimir Lenin, 'Sozialismus und Religion', 6; Cf. Lenin, 'Über das Verhältnis der Arbeiterpartei', 20. 23.

¹³ Lenin, 'Sozialismus und Religion', 8-9.

¹⁴ Lenin, 'Sozialismus und Religion', 10; vgl. Lenin, 'Über das Verhältnis der Arbeiterpartei', 20. 24. 26.

¹⁵ Lenin, 'Sozialismus und Religion', 11; vgl. Lenin, 'Über das Verhältnis der Arbeiterpartei', 21. 23.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Heller, 'Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche', in: Christoph Gassenschmidt/ Ralph Tuchtenhagen (eds.), *Politik und Religion in der Sowjetunion 1917-1941*, (Wiesbaden 2001), 13-46, 22.

¹⁷ The synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (1917/18) elected on the 18th November 1917 Metropolitan of Moscow Tikhon (Bellavin) (1865-1925) to be the new patriarch after the patriarchal chair had remained vacant for nearly 200 years.

approximately 15 to 17 million people were exterminated during the years 1917/18.¹⁸ We cannot say exactly how many clergymen lost their lives during these so-called “administrative killings,” but taking into account the political significance that the church had for the communist government we must conclude, that their number was significant. We have some pieces of theoretical evidence: According to Vladimir Bonč-Bruevič, one of the leading Bolsheviks, the Orthodox clergy represented one pillar of the Russian monarchy and for ideological reasons supported reactionary activities.¹⁹ Lenin himself called Patriarch Tikhon a leader of the counterrevolutionary clergy.²⁰ These assessments of two leading Bolsheviks make it possible to conclude, that Orthodox clergy was one of the primary targets.

We can draw further conclusions from a pragmatic text, which Lenin wrote in a particular situation: After the famine of the summer 1921 in the Volga region the Soviet government ordered in a decree of 23rd February 1922 that church valuables are to be confiscated and sold.²¹ The money should be used to buy food for the suffering population. Local Soviets were charged with the confiscation.²² In some towns there were clashes between the Orthodox population and confiscating commandos. On the background of these events Lenin wrote a secret letter to members of the Politburo on the 19th March 1922.²³ In this letter Lenin proposed to use the situation in order to arrest and to execute the largest possible number of the oppositional middle class and the clergy. Lenin was of the opinion that the apocalyptic mood of the population was favorable for such a measure. As to the confiscated Church valuables, accordingly to Lenin they should be used by the government to improve its gold stock.²⁴

These factors confirm the view generally accepted by scholars that during the year after the communist revolution in Russia a large number of Orthodox clergymen lost their lives.²⁵ The recently published documents give a precise but not complete account of the high number of Orthodox clergy killed at this time.²⁶ Patriarch Tikhon himself represents a

¹⁸ Vladimir Solouchin, “Ansätze zur »Entleninisierung«”, in: Adolf Hampel, *Glasnost und Perestroika – eine Herausforderung für die Kirchen*, (Frankfurt am Main 1989), 183-194, p. 184-185.

¹⁹ Vladimir Bonč-Bruevič, „Živaâ cerkov’“ i proletariat, Moskva 1929, 1-8. 12-13. 17.

²⁰ Vladimir Lenin, ‘Neizdannoe pis’mo členam politbüro’, in: *Vestnik Russkogo Christianskogo Dvizienija*, 98 (1970) 4, 54-57, p. 54. 57.

²¹ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 671, text 234.

²² Ibid.; compare. *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 15(28).02.1922, 190.

²³ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 674-676, text 236.

²⁴ Lenin, ‘Neizdannoe pis’mo’, 54-57.

²⁵ Chrysostomus, *Kirchengeschichte Russlands*, 120; Roman Rössler, *Kirche und Revolution in Russland, Patriarch Tikhon und der Sowjetstaat*, Köln/Wien 1969, 43.

²⁶ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 833-909.

particular and very controversial case. Regarding this issue Karl-Christian Felmy pointed to the particular significance that the person of the Patriarch has for the Moscow Patriarchate and for the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad: Both of them refer to him to legitimize their positions.²⁷ This significance of Tikhon has to be borne in mind, when we read assessments of representatives of different branches of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Tikhon and the Synod which elected him, pronounced a very harsh criticism against the new rulers. In his letter of the 1st of February 1918 Tikhon anathematized the atrocities committed in large parts of the country. He condemned the exclusion of the Church from public life as well as destructions and desecrations of churches and Orthodox sanctuaries and expropriation of churches and monasteries.²⁸ In a letter, that Tikhon possibly wrote in February 1918 he characterized the new rulers as enemies of Russia.²⁹ A letter of the Patriarch written on the 8th March 1918 called attacks on the Orthodox Church satanic.³⁰ In his letter to the Counsel of People's Commissioners of the 7th November 1918 Tikhon strongly condemned communist politics.³¹ In the night from the 11th to the 12th November the house of Tikhon was searched, he himself was put under house arrest.³² An accusation against him was prepared; the Patriarch should be put on trial.

Tikhon was accused of spreading counterrevolutionary propaganda and of supporting activities against the new political system.³³ The real intention of the communist government was however to reduce Tikhon's influence within the population by discrediting him through a juridical procedure.³⁴ In fact, the Patriarch's popularity caused headache to the new rulers;³⁵ it is why they decided to restrict his activities. But there obviously was no clear conception of how to handle the problem, as even people within the government did not really know, why Tikhon was under house arrest.³⁶ Kalinin sent an inquiry to Dzeržinskij asking him about reasons for Tikhon's house arrest.³⁷

²⁷ Karl-Christian Felmy, 'Patriarch Tichon im Urteil der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche der Gegenwart', in: *Kirche im Osten* 8 (1965) 25-54.

²⁸ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 19.01(01.02).1918, 82-85.

²⁹ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 02(?).1918, 103-105.

³⁰ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 26.07(08.08).1918, 144-147.

³¹ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 25.10(07.11)1918, 151-153.

³² *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 69-73, Nr. 4-9; Cf. 76, Nr.14.

³³ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 93, Nr. 27; 255, Nr.150; 263-332.

³⁴ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 100-101, Nr.32.

³⁵ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 93-98, Nr.28, p. 93 *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 04(17).12.1920, 169.

³⁶ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 92, Nr.26; 100f, Nr.32.

³⁷ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 100-101, Nr.32.

At the same time the Patriarch's popularity was obviously the reason why the Bolsheviks never tried to kill him. Tikhon was not entirely isolated and sometimes he was allowed to lead a Church service.³⁸ Finally, the trial was set for the 24th Mai 1923.³⁹ On the 19th April 1923 the Patriarch was put in the jail of the Central Political Administration.⁴⁰ On the 16th June 1923 Tikhon wrote a letter to the High Court of the Russian Socialist Republic. In this letter he recognized accusations against him, regretted his previous anti-Soviet activities and asked the court to release him from jail. Tikhon also declared that he was no more an enemy of the Soviet state.⁴¹ The court decided to release the Patriarch.⁴² The Court's decision was considered as a partial amnesty but the accusation against Tikhon was not lifted.⁴³ Later, on the 21st Mai 1924 the legal procedure against Tikhon was stopped, because the influence of religion was reduced and the Patriarch no longer presented any danger to the Soviet government.⁴⁴ In an interview that Tikhon gave to the official newspaper, *Izvestja*, he thanked the government for its trust and emphasized his loyalty.⁴⁵ But in March 1925 the Political Administration started planning a new trial against the patriarch. Tikhon was accused of collecting material about antireligious persecution in Russia.⁴⁶ Due to heart illness,⁴⁷ Tikhon died on the 7th April 1925.

Metropolitan Petr (Polánskij) became the administrator of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate on the 12th April 1925.⁴⁸ In Mai 1925 Petr published a text, which was declared to be the last will of patriarch Tikhon. The text contained the following main points: 1. the Soviet government is from God; 2. the decree about the separation between state and church of 1918 promotes freedom of religion; 3. it is a religious duty of Orthodox Christians to be sincere towards the Soviet government and to condemn all anti-Soviet activities; 4. the Soviet government represents indeed the interests of the working class and farmers; 5. Tikhon condemns anti-Soviet activities of the immigrant Orthodox clergy; these people are asked to

³⁸ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 112, Nr.45.

³⁹ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 337f, Nr.171

⁴⁰ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 334, Nr.166; 336f, Nr.169f.

⁴¹ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 357, Nr.183; *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 03(16).06.1923, 280f.

⁴² *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 358, Nr.184; *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 12(25).06.1923, 281.

⁴³ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 28.03(10.04).1924, 315.

⁴⁴ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 364f, Nr.190; *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 08(21).03.1924, 313.

⁴⁵ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 09(22).03.1924, 313-314.

⁴⁶ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 399-401, Nr.228; 402, Nr.229.

⁴⁷ *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 392f, Nr.219.

⁴⁸ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 30.03(12.04).1925, 413-416f; *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 414-416, Nr.234. In his testament Tikhon appointed for this function Metropolitan Kirill as the first candidate, Metropolitan Agafangel as the second candidate and Metropolitan Petr (Polánskij) as the third candidate (Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 714, text 259). The two first candidate being exiled, Petr assumed the position (*Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 25.03(07.04).1925, 757-768, p 757).

return to Russia and to repent for their activities.⁴⁹ In his missive of the 28th July 1925 Petr appealed to the Christians to obey the Soviet government.⁵⁰

One primary aim of the Russian Orthodox Church during this time was to obtain registration from the government, as the new law demanded that all religious societies be registered. The Orthodox Church could not have an official administration as long as a registration was not accorded. However, the Soviet government did not want to give it for nothing, and concessions, which Tikhon and Petr had made, were obviously not sufficient. Communists expected the Orthodox leadership to excommunicate the emigrant clergy. But Petr was obviously not ready for this step. He was finally exiled.

The leading position within the Orthodox episcopate was gained by the Metropolitan Sergij of Nižnij Novgorod. In his letter to Soviet officials written on the 10th June 1926 Sergij asked for registration.⁵¹ His declaration assured the Soviet government of the loyalty of the Orthodox Church. In the same letter Sergij emphasized existing differences between the Church and communism: It is a declared objective of the communists to extinguish belief from people's hearts, while the mission of Church is to plant this belief in people's hearts. Further Sergij declared that the Church cannot control the political opinions of its community members nor can it punish the emigrant Orthodox clergy.⁵² This letter did not achieve any significant change in the government's position regarding the Orthodox Church. But a significant change was achieved by the next letter, which Sergij wrote on the 29th July 1927. Here Sergij declared that the Russian Orthodox Church identifies with the Soviet Union and that clergymen who cannot adopt this patriotic attitude should leave the church. The letter also condemned anti-Soviet activities of the Russian Orthodox clergy living abroad: These people should recognize the Soviet Union or be separated from the Orthodox Church.⁵³ After this declaration the administration of the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed to be registered.⁵⁴

The first Constitution established separation between church and state as the basis for further religious legislation in the Soviet Union: The law of 8th April 1929 regulated that religious societies have to be registered; 20 people over 18 years of age were required to

⁴⁹ *Akty svâtejšego Tihona*, 25.03(07.04).1925, 361-363; *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarha Tuhona*, 409-413, Nr.232.

⁵⁰ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 715-716, text 260.

⁵¹ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 723-724, text 262.

⁵² Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 724-726, text 263.

⁵³ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 726-730, text 264.

⁵⁴ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 730-732, text 265.

constitute a religious society. Religious societies were forbidden to teach religion to children.⁵⁵ Art. 4 of the Russian constitution of 1929 did not mention “freedom of religious propaganda” anymore, but assured the freedom of “religious confession.”⁵⁶ The Constitution of 1936 explained that the USSR guarantees to its citizens “freedom to accomplish religious rites and freedom of antireligious propaganda”.⁵⁷ Art. 57 of the decree of 19th July 1973 obliged parents to educate their children in the spirit of communism.⁵⁸ And the preamble of the Constitution of 1977 declared the education of communist persons to be a main task of the Soviet state.⁵⁹

But in reality laws were never the basis for treatment of church or Christians by the Soviet administration. The actual source for different antireligious measures from the beginning of 1960s were secret orders and decrees of Soviet officials, which were never published.⁶⁰ The law concerning religions published on the 23rd June 1975 modified some articles of the earlier law of 1929,⁶¹ and fixed some regulations, which were already juridical praxis for a number of years. It is therefore correct to say that this law did not represent any legal novelty.⁶² The *Perestroika* policy did not initiate any changes to the condition of the Russian Orthodox Church, but subsequently the situation changed considerably. The law of 1st October 1997 emphasized the eminent historical role of the Orthodox Church for the Russian nation.⁶³ At the end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998 the Russian Orthodox Church regained the position within society that it had before the revolution of 1917.⁶⁴ The *Basic Social Concepts of the Russian Orthodox Church* elaborated by a church commission and approved by the Moscow Synod (13-16 August 2000) is proof of an independent theological thinking within the Russian Orthodox Church.⁶⁵

⁵⁵ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 735-738, text 267.

⁵⁶ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 738-739, text 268.

⁵⁷ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 748, text 274.

⁵⁸ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 881, text 363.

⁵⁹ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 899-900, text 368.

⁶⁰ Cf. Gerhard Simon, *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien. Das sowjetische Religionsgesetz vom Juni 1975*, (Köln, 1976), 10-14.

⁶¹ For a detailed analysis: Gerhard Simon, *Berichte des Bundesinstituts*.

⁶² Simon, *Berichte des Bundesinstituts*, 1, 6.

⁶³ ‘Föderales Gesetz. Über Gewissensfreiheit und religiöse Vereinigungen’, in: *Osteuropa* 48 (1998) 7, A 274-A 286, here A 274.

⁶⁴ Gerd Stricker, ‘Das Moskauer Patriarchat im Zeichen des neuen Nationalismus’, in: *Osteuropa* 48 (1998) 3, 269-281, p. 268.

⁶⁵ Cf. Rudolf Uertz, ‘Einführung in die politische Theorie des russisch-orthodoxen Christentums’, in: Josef Thesing/Rudolf Uertz (eds.), *Die Grundlagen der Sozialdoktrin der Russisch-Orthodoxen Kirche*, Sankt Augustin 2001, 134-173, p. 134.

Looking back it is easy to say that identification with the Soviet state, which Sergij declared in 1927, made it possible for the Orthodox Church to survive in Soviet Russia. But any critical comment on the Soviet reality under these conditions was difficult to make. The following historical developments only consolidated this situation. The German invasion of Russia forced Stalin to look for moral support from the Orthodox Church. On 4th September he received leading Orthodox hierarchs and promised them the opportunity to hold a synod and to elect a new patriarch, as the patriarchal chair remained vacant after the death of Tikhon.⁶⁶ The synod was held in the beginning of 1945 (31st January-2nd February 1945). At the opening session the participants thanked Stalin and the Soviet government for their care of the Orthodox Church and for the possibility to grow that it has in Soviet Union.⁶⁷ Metropolitan Nikolaj gave an account of the reception given by Stalin, rendered in panegyric tones: the Metropolitan compared Stalin to a father who cares for his children.⁶⁸ It is remarkable that the moral support the Soviet state received from the Moscow Patriarchate during the war did not change its status. The synod of 1945 proves that the Orthodox Church was not only totally dependent on the Soviet government, but also entirely recognized its moral authority. This point helps us to understand why the will of the Soviet government was considered by Patriarchal leadership as the criteria of what is useful for the church.⁶⁹ As a result Orthodox clergymen and bishops, who opposed the religious politics of the Soviet state were dismissed and defamed.

In reality, the situation of Orthodox clergymen and Christians in Soviet Union was catastrophically bad. About half a year before his death, Patriarch Tikhon described in his letter to the Soviet government written on 30th September 1924 the following situation: Large numbers of the Orthodox clergy and Christians were arrested and exiled. The Soviet religious politics destroyed the material basis of the Orthodox Church. The antireligious propaganda created within society a climate of distrust and animosity towards the church. Churches and monasteries were closed and transformed into clubs and cinemas.⁷⁰ Exiled Orthodox bishops addressed a memorandum on 7th June 1926 to the Soviet government. The document is one of the shocking proofs of the existing gap between the Soviet legislation and the Soviet reality.

⁶⁶ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 758, text 282.

⁶⁷ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 765, text 290.

⁶⁸ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 776-777, text 298.

⁶⁹ Metropolitan Pimen described at the meeting of bishops (28th Mai 1971) the opinions concerning the parish statute of 1961, which contradict the Soviet law as harmful for the Orthodox Church (Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 871, Text 359).

⁷⁰ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 704-707, text 257.

Bishops emphasized, on the one hand, that the Soviet constitution guarantees to citizens freedom of religion and stated, on the other hand, that in reality the church must submit to essential restrictions: The clergy is not allowed to teach religion to people less than 18 years of age, churches and monasteries were closed; Christians removed from schools, religious books forbidden.⁷¹

During the mid 1960's an opposition within the Orthodox Church began to arise. They aimed their criticism not only at the Soviet government, but also at the Soviet friendly Patriarchate leadership. A remarkable example of this conflict represents the open letter, which priests Nikolaj Ešliman and Gleb Jakunin addressed to the patriarch Aleksij on 21st November 1965. The authors reproached the Orthodox leadership and the clergy for its total support of the Soviet politics of destruction of the Church of Christ.⁷² The patriarch reacted by removing Ešliman and Jakunin from their functions as Orthodox priests.⁷³ This measure proved that the Orthodox patriarchate supported criminalization of religious literature and of critics against the communist regime. Another revealing document from this period is the letter, which archbishop Ermogen sent to the Patriarch on 25th December 1967. Ermogen criticized in it the current methods of nomination of the Orthodox episcopate as well as formation of the synod as not canonical. As for the parochial statute adopted in 1961,⁷⁴ the Archbishop explained that according to it, the Orthodox priests lost their leading role within the parish and could not even be considered as a parish member.⁷⁵ Ermogen was soon punished: The synod described in a resolution of the 30th July 1968 Ermogen's activities as harmful to the Church and removed him from his function as an archbishop.⁷⁶

Some words, spoken by Orthodox officials publicly, made it possible to recognize that the Russian Orthodox Church now lived in very hard times. In a speech held on the 40th anniversary of the Patriarchate, Aleksij emphasized that hardships are necessary for the Church and asserted that the Church of Christ will never be entirely swallowed by Hell.⁷⁷ In his address to the participants of the conference of disarmament (Moscow 15-16 February 1961), Aleksij explained once again that afflictions are indispensable, but the Lord cares for

⁷¹ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 716-722, text 261.

⁷² Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 840-848, text 343. For political oppression in Russia see: Mark Hopkins, *Russia's Underground Press. The Chronicle of Current Events*, New York 1983.

⁷³ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 852-853, text 349.

⁷⁴ The new parish statute was introduced because the Soviet government urged the Orthodox Church to adapt its regulations to the Soviet laws. (Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 824-827, text 331).

⁷⁵ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 858-860, text 351.

⁷⁶ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 861, text 352.

⁷⁷ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 806, text 319.

his Church so Hell will never overcome it.⁷⁸ Apart from these rather coded statements it is astonishing that despite its antireligious politics and active practices of Church destruction, the Soviet government not only did not receive any criticism from the Moscow Patriarchate, but the Orthodox leadership even supported Soviet politics in Russia and abroad. Patriarch Aleksij justified the suppression of the Hungarian uprising by Soviet troops.⁷⁹ Metropolitan Nikolaj adopted in his speech pronounced on 13th May 1958 that the Soviet rhetoric of “defense of peace” and “fight for peace” and described these activities as the most important task.⁸⁰ Statements, which Orthodox hierarchs made abroad, show that the Orthodox Church in Russia approved the Soviet policies without restriction: Delegates of the Russian Orthodox Church to the conference of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi (3rd March 1976) regretted that the Council built its opinion about conditions in the socialist countries on the basis of statements given by emigrants and not by official delegates on these countries.⁸¹ The declaration made by the synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on 20th March 1980 explained that Orthodox Christians take an active part in the construction of socialist society. The declaration criticized the activities of NATO members in strong terms and justified the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.⁸²

To legitimate its support of the Soviet state, the Orthodox leadership gave a positive interpretation to developments during the post-revolutionary period in Russia. So in its address on 23rd May 1978, the Orthodox synod emphasized Tikhon’s insight that the Orthodox Church has to be open and sincere towards the Soviet Union and has to engage with Soviet society. The synod called Patriarch Sergij a “clever and wise helmsman” who contributed significantly to the normalization of the relationship between church and state and promoted the spirit of patriotism by Christians. Merits of Aleksij were recognized too.⁸³ A significant point of reference for this historical interpretation represented the mentioned “testament” of patriarch Tikhon. In fact, the authenticity of this document was contested from the very beginning and a large amount of research has been devoted to this problem.⁸⁴ What

⁷⁸ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 812-813, text 323.

⁷⁹ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 805-806, text 318.

⁸⁰ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 807-809, text 320.

⁸¹ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 894-899, text 367.

⁸² Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 917-920, text 371.

⁸³ Hauptmann/ Stricker, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, 913-916, text 370. Cf. interview with patriarch Pimen: *Pimen Patriarch von Moskau zur Situation des Glaubens in Russland. Ein Interview von Alceste Santini*, München 1988, 120-122.

⁸⁴ To name just some of them: Otto Luchterhandt, *Der Sowjetstaat und die Russisch-Orthodoxe Kirche. Eine rechtshistorische und rechtssystematische Untersuchung*, Köln 1976 (Abhandlungen des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, 30); Johannes Chrysostomus, *Kirchengeschichte Rußlands der*

is remarkable is that no official Orthodox presentation written during the Soviet time or even during the *Perestroika* indicates how problematic this issue is, but just presents the “testament” as the last word of Tikhon concerning the church relation to the Soviet state.⁸⁵ A recent Russian Orthodox analysis finally settled the problem as follows: The “testament” is a product of the Soviet political administration. Tikhon always refused to sign it. So it was published after Tikhon’s death, when the Patriarch could not revoke it any more.⁸⁶

On the one hand, this conclusion satisfyingly solves the problem of the “testament,” but, on the other hand, in its light, official Orthodox declarations concerning the “testament” in particular and the situation of the Orthodox Church and Christians in Soviet Russia in general apparently need a revision. It is remarkable how continuously the fact of religious persecution in the Soviet Union was denied by Orthodox officials. Even in his interview, according to the Italian journalist Alceste Santini on 3rd January 1987, Patriarch Pimen emphasized that the Soviet constitution guarantees to citizens the freedom of religion and nobody is persecuted in the Soviet state because of his faith.⁸⁷ But soon Soviet officials themselves gave a very different description of the Soviet reality: The new chief of the commission of religious affairs, Konstantin Harčov, argued in 1988 that the laws of 1929 “chained” the church and created conditions for arbitrary treatment by the Soviet state. Harčov emphasized that not laws but secret orders of Soviet officials represented the basis for repression against the church.⁸⁸ Gorbačëv spoke on 29th April 1988 to high Orthodox leaders of a religious repression in the Soviet Union and assured them that the rights of the Orthodox Church would be reestablished.⁸⁹

Alexander Men’ was one of the Russian Orthodox priests who actively de-sovietized the consciousness of Russian people. Men’ did not belong to Soviet dissidents; he refused to sign the open letter written by Nikolaj Ešliman and Gleb Jakunin. Men’ did not criticize the Soviet state openly, but indeed Men’ was more dangerous for the Soviet totalitarian system than a political dissident because he persuaded others of the incompatibility between the

neuesten Zeit. I: Patriarch Tichon 1917-1925, München 1965; Johannes Chrysostomus, ‘Kirche und Staat in Sowjetrußland. Das Schicksal des Moskauer Patriarchats 1917-1960’, in: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Osteuropas* 11 (1963) 13-36; Roman Rössler, *Kirche und Revolution in Russland, Patriarch Tichon und der Sowjetstaat*, Köln/Wien 1969. I discuss this question in a different study: Igor Pochoshajew, ‘Patriarch Tichon und die Sowjetmacht’, *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung* 124 (2007).

⁸⁵ Exemplary is: Pitirim, Metropolit von Volokolamsk und Juriev (ed.), *Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche*, Berlin/New York 1988, 68.

⁸⁶ *Akty svätejšego Tihona*, 25.03(07.04).1925, 757-768.

⁸⁷ Pimen. *Interview von Alceste Santini*, 118.

⁸⁸ Hampel, *Glasnost und Perestroika*, 30.

⁸⁹ Hampel, *Glasnost und Perestroika*, 33-34.

Christian faith and communist ideology.⁹⁰ To spread his ideas, Men' organized small groups, which were the most appropriate method to oppose the totalitarian regime in Russia.⁹¹

According to his convictions Men' focused on literary activity.⁹² In "Religion, the 'Cult of Personality,' and the Secular State" Men' analyses recent Soviet history, characterizing Russian society as ill. The totalitarian system is the cause. To explain the phenomenon of the 'Cult of Personality,' Men's historical analysis begins with Roman emperors, leading through the Medieval Period to the Russian revolution of 1917. Men' does not idealize conditions in monarchic Russia, but affirms that non-Orthodox Christians were brutally oppressed. Men' explains that the coalition between monarchy and church destroyed people's trust in the Orthodox Church, the church failing to accomplish its mission within society. Men' gives a positive assessment of the principle of separation between state and church. He thinks that the 'medicine' against a possible relapse into a totalitarian regime in Russia is a consistent application of the principle of a secular state.⁹³ However, the decisive factor for Men' is not structural changes, but ethical growth of the individual. Men' argues that all political reforms will remain useless as long as a spiritual renewal of people does not take place. This renewal is to be accomplished through a long educational process of fostering Christian consciousness.⁹⁴ Consequently, Men' attributes to Christianity a central role for the ethical renewal of Russian society.⁹⁵ As to the situation of the Orthodox Church during the Soviet time, Men' stated critically that the church could not play an active role and was practically reduced to issuing statements in support of Soviet politics.⁹⁶

To assess the actual and future relevance of Men's thinking for public opinion in Russia, two factors have to be considered: 1. the attitude of official Orthodoxy to Men'; 2. Men's popularity. Concerning the first point we must take into account that Men's assessment of the church-state relationship in monarchic Russia is quite different from the official Orthodox position. The *Basic Social Concepts* regards the Orthodox state as the best

⁹⁰ 'Liminaire', in: Plamia, 5; Cf. Aleksandr Men', 'Trudnyj put' k dialogu', in: Aleksandr Men', *Trudnyj put' k dialogu*, Moskva 2001, 23-40, p. 31-32.

⁹¹ A. Bessmertnyj-Ancimirov, in: *I byloutro ... Vospominaniã ob otce Aleksandre Mene*, Moskva 1992, 330-339.

⁹² For a bibliography of Men's works: J.G. Krotov, in: *Sbornik pamãti o. Aleksandra Menã*, Moskva 1991, 210-218.

⁹³ Russian text: Aleksandr Men', 'Religiã, «kul't liãnosti» i sekularnoe gosudarstvo', in: Aleksandr Men', *Trudnyj put' k dialogu*, Moskva 2001, 127-168. English translation: Roberts/Shukman, *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*, 109-138.

⁹⁴ Zoã Maslenikova, *Žizn' otca Aleksandra Menã*, Moskau 1995, 234.

⁹⁵ L.I. Vasilenko, 'Hristianstvo i kul'tura v trudah protoiereã Aleksandra Menã', in: *Protoierej Aleksandr Men'. Kul'tura i duhovnoe voshoždenie*, Moskva 1992, 471-481, p. 474-476.

⁹⁶ Aleksandr Men', Sueveriã, razum, vera, in: *Trudnyj put' k dialogu*, Moskva 2001, 13-22, p. 13.

political system.⁹⁷ So we should not be surprised by the fact that Men's position is not recognized as 'orthodox.' In his letter on the occasion of Men's funeral, the Patriarch recognized the merits of this Orthodox priest, but at the same time emphasized that his opinions did not necessarily represent the position of the Russian Orthodox Church.⁹⁸ The attitude of the Orthodox clergy toward Men' is rather divided. But in Russian intellectual circles Men's works enjoy great popularity. Educated people and open minded Orthodox clergymen use Men's books as standard works.⁹⁹ Given the particular social role of this group of people, I agree with authors in Russia and in the West who consider the ideas of Alexander Men' of growing importance.¹⁰⁰

As to the textbook *History of Religion*¹⁰¹ that I focus on in this study, it is remarkable that it does not speak about the "October revolution," but uses the term "October overthrow." The book says that the October overthrow was opposed by the Russian Orthodox Church. Tikhon condemned cruelties of the new government. On the 1918 decree on separation between church and state, the book explains that it formally abolished the church's dependence on the state and could therefore be regarded as a positive measure of the new government. In reality this law intended the destruction of the Russian Orthodox Church, the proof of it being the murder of thousands of Orthodox monks and clergymen during the civil war and after. The book further says that the Orthodox Church was oppressed by the Soviet government. It is why a new patriarch could not be elected after the death of Tikhon. Even as Sergij appealed to Christians to recognize the new government, the persecution did not stop. Clergymen were wrongly accused of supporting counterrevolutionary activities and sent to labor camps. The book emphasizes that World War II obliged Stalin to revise religious policies, Stalin wanting to use the Orthodox Church to mobilize patriotism in the Russian population. The book explains that on this occasion it was possible because during the centuries the Orthodox Church in Russia was associated with the Russian nation. For this purpose Stalin ordered priests to be released from camps and allowed a new patriarch to be

⁹⁷ *Basic Social Concepts of the Russian Orthodox Church*: III. Church and state.

⁹⁸ Patriarch Aleksij, in: *Pamâti protoiereja Aleksandra Menâ, Moskva* 1991, 20.

⁹⁹ Aleksandr Zorin, Angel černorabočij, Moskva 2004, 230-240.

¹⁰⁰ Katherina Genieva, in: IX *Father Aleksandr Men's International Conference. Moscow 6-9 September 1999*, Moscow 2000, 11; Elizabeth Roberts and Ann Shukman, *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century: The Life and Work of Alexander Men*, London 1996, 2, 24-25. On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of Men's death on the 9th September 2005 Russian television presented a program about Alexander Men'. In Germany, academy of diocese Rottenburg-Stuttgart confers annually an Alexander-Men'-prize of merit in intercultural mediation between Russia and Germany.

¹⁰¹ G.A., Eliceev, *Istoriâ religij*, Moskva 1997. This book is recommended by the Ministry for Education of Russian Federation for use in the 10th and 11th school classes

elected. After Stalin's death in 1953 repressions resumed. Although not as bloody as at the start of Soviet history, the Orthodox Church was entirely subdued to the repressive Soviet administration. At the same time the Soviet government promoted the most obscene and cynical antireligious propaganda, but the Orthodox Church continued to exist despite the dominant doctrine of atheism. Its authority has even continuously grown from the second half of 1980's. The breakdown of the Soviet system and disintegration of the Soviet Union caused a miraculous growth of influence of the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁰²

Apart from historical details presented in this textbook, which I do not want to discuss here, the description it gives is objective. Although the author does not hide his negative attitude toward the Soviet regime, nor does he distort reality in general on behalf of his feelings. Summing up, one may say that sources readily available to the Russian public nowadays give a rather unanimous interpretation of the situation of the Russian Orthodox Church during the Soviet period. I could not find any official Orthodox interpretation published recently, but I did not analyze teaching material used in Orthodox educational institutions in Russia. The educated and open-minded Russian public, who read Alexander Men', will learn from him how important Christian ethics are in order to avoid a new totalitarian system in Russia. Surely, this opinion is very questionable if we consider that during history, Christian ethics have not necessarily promoted democratic systems, but within the 'evolutionary' theology of Men' it sounds consistent: Men's argues that Christianity stands actually at the very beginning of its historical development.¹⁰³ We must conclude that it will not return to errors of its past. As to the textbook, its quite differentiated description of historical details will surely promote critical thinking in the new Russian generation. At the same time the textbook offers a theological interpretation: The Russian Orthodox Church has not only survived adverse Soviet reality but has been strengthened by it. I do not know whether the author intended to say it explicitly, but it is clear to me from his book. It calls to mind the words of Aleksij, that the gates of Hell will not swallow the Church of Christ.

¹⁰² Elicev, *Istoriâ religij*, 271-272.

¹⁰³ Vasilenko, 'Hristianstvo i kul'tura', 474.