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Liturgical Commemorations, Political Dissent and Religious Schism in the Russian Orthodox Church during the 1920s and 1930s

Carol Dockham †

Georgetown University

Abstract

In the early Soviet period, the long Christian tradition of praying for secular and ecclesiastical rulers played an important role in Orthodox debates over legitimate authority, especially after the death of Patriarch Tikhon (Bellavin, 1865–1925) in March 1925. When Metropolitan Sergii (Stragorodskii, 1867–1944), the acting leader of the patriarchal church, ordered the liturgical commemoration of the atheistic Soviet government as the secular authority and himself as the ecclesiastical authority in October 1927, he immediately provoked strong resistance from a group of hierarchs, clergy and laypersons in Leningrad. Because this opposition was expressed publicly at worship services, the Bolsheviks considered it a form of anti-Soviet agitation. For Orthodox believers, however, commemoration represented an ecclesiastical rather than a secular question. Sergii himself resisted Soviet pressure to stop commemorating his own superior, the imprisoned Metropolitan Petr (Polianskii, 1862–1937). Despite the bitter divisions among the followers of Patriarch Tikhon in the decade that followed his death, both Sergii and his opponents both prayed for Petr – a fragile thread that united the church's contending factions.

Keywords

Sergii (Ivan Nikolaevich Stragorodsky) – Tikhon (Vasilii Ivanovich Bellavin) – Petr (Petr Fedorovich Polianskii) – liturgical commemoration – religious freedom – Russian Orthodox Church – religious persecution

Following the 1917 revolutions, the Russian Orthodox Church found itself beset by external and internal schisms. Some were a consequence of the disintegra-

tion of the Russian Empire, such as the reappearance of an independent Georgian Church and the establishment of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church.¹ In the early 1920s, émigré Russian clergy established branches of the Orthodox Church in the countries to which they fled, which greatly complicated relations between the Mother Church and Bolshevik state and became a schism by the end of the 1920s that lasted for decades.² In 1922, the Bolsheviks backed the Ren-

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Stefanos Alexopoulos of Catholic University, Dr. Carl Lardiero, and Protopresbyter Michael Koblosh, All-Saints of North America Orthodox Mission, Alexandria, Virginia, for reviewing earlier drafts of this paper. I found their comments and suggestions extremely useful in improving it. I am responsible for all remaining shortcomings.

A word on my use of dual dates: the Julian date during the Twentieth century was 13 days behind the Gregorian one. Many of the church documents I cite included both dates, a practice the Russian Church began during the late Imperial period. The Bolshevik state adopted the Gregorian calendar in February 1918, and therefore only a single date appeared on these documents.

Following the February revolution, the Georgian Church proclaimed its autocephaly, or, perhaps more accurately, reclaimed it, whereupon the Provisional Government in Petrograd granted it recognition as a separate, independent Church on 27 March 1917. The Russian Church objected to this and broke communion with the Georgian Church, which was not restored until 1943. A Church council in Kiev began discussing Ukrainian autocephaly in early January 1918, but the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church was not established until 1921, ironically after the Soviets had gained control of Ukraine. The Church was absorbed into the Moscow Patriarchate following the Second World War, but it reappeared following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. V.A. Alekseev, *Illiuzii i dogmy* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991), 41–43; Andre Partykevich, *Between Kyiv and Constantinople: Oleksander Lototsky and the Quest for Ukrainian Autocephaly*, Church Studies Papers (Edmonton: Canadian Inst. of Ukrainian Studies, Univ. of Alberta, 1998).

² The two leading émigré branches of the Russian Orthodox Church in Western Europe began as the *Vremennoe Vysshee Tserkovnoe Upravlenie na Iugo-Vostoche Rossii* (VVTsU – Provisional Higher Church Administration in Southeastern Russia), which was created in early 1919. The hierarchs of the VVTsU were evacuated with the White forces from the Crimea in November 1920, and formed the “Karlovatskii Sobor,” named for the town in Serbia (Sremski Karlovtsy) where it was established. Metropolitan Antonii (Khrapovitskii) of Kiev led it until his death in 1936. The Karlovatskii Sobor broke with the Church in Russia soon after Sergii's Declaration of Loyalty to the Soviet state in July 1927. It became known as the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, which moved its headquarters to New York in 1950. A second group under Metropolitan Evlogii (Georgievskii) broke with the Karlovatskii Sobor in 1926 over the issue of who controlled Russian parishes in Western Europe. Evlogii established his headquarters in France and maintained ties with the Church in Russia even after Sergii's declaration of loyalty. However, following the latter's interviews with foreign journalists in February 1930, in which Sergii claimed there was no persecution of religion in the Soviet Union, Evlogii broke with Sergii, after which he and his branch of the Church submitted to the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia re-established canonical communion with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007. Among the many studies of the émigré Russian churches that came out of the revo-

ovationist schism (*obnovlenchestvo*), which consisted largely of “white,” married clergy who usurped control of the Russian Church from Patriarch Tikhon after the latter was placed under house arrest.³ Following Tikhon’s death in March 1925, a period of confusion ensued known as the “church’s time of troubles” (*tserkovnaia smuta*), in which various hierarchs squabbled over ecclesiastical authority within the Patriarchal Church. The situation lasted for several years, until the Soviet government recognized Metropolitan Sergii (Stragorodskii) as the legal head of the Patriarchal Church, after which he issued his “Declaration of Loyalty” on 16/29 July 1927.⁴

Several months later, Sergii issued a decree on 8/21 October 1927 ordering the commemoration of the Soviet government as the secular authority and himself as the ecclesiastical authority during the Divine services.⁵ In reaction, a group of hierarchs, clergy and laypersons in Leningrad began voicing their opposition to Sergii. Although they were not the only ones who opposed Sergii, the Bolsheviks paid particular attention to them because their opposition was expressed publicly at worship services through refusal to properly commemorate the secular authorities or Sergii. They interpreted this refusal in political terms, as agitation that was stirring up the masses and setting them against the Soviet

lutionary period are I.M. Andreev, *Kratkii obzor istorii russkoi tserkvi o revoliutsii do nashikh dnei* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1951); Evlogii (Georgievskii), *Put’ moei zhizni. Vospominaniia mitropolita Evlogiiia (Georgievskogo)* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1947); N. Kashevarov, *Pravoslavnaia rossiiskaia tserkov’ i sovetskoe gosudarstvo: 1917–1922* (Moscow: Izd-vo Krutitskogo podvora, 1922); Obshchestvo liubitelei tserkovnoi istorii, 2005); A.A. Kostriukov, *Russkaia zarubezhnaia tserkov’ v pervoi polovine 1920-kh godov: organizatsiia tserkovnogo upravleniia v emigratsii* (Moscow: Pravoslavnyi Sviato-Tikhonovskii Universitet, 2007).

3 Among the more important scholarly studies that have appeared on the Renovationist schism since the fall of the Soviet Union are Edward E. Roslof, *Red Priests: Renovationism Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); and M.V. Shkarovskii, *Obnovlencheskoe dvizhenie v Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi xx veka* (St. Petersburg: 1999).

4 “Poslanie (Deklaratsiia) Zamestitel’ia Patriarshego Mestobliustitelia mitropolita Nizhegorodskogo Sergiiia [Stragorodskogo] i Vremennogo pri nem Patriarshego Sviashchennogo Sinoda ob otnoshenii Pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi Tserkvi k sushchestvuiushchei grazhdanskoi vlasti, 16 (29).07.1927,” in M.E. Gubonin, ed., *Akty Sviateishego Tikhonova, Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseia Rossii, Pozdneishie dokumenty i perepiska o kanonicheskem preemstve vysshei tserkovnoi vlasti 1917–1943. Sbornik v dvukh chastiakh* (Moscow: Pravoslavnyi Sviato-Tikhonovskii Bogoslovskii Institut, 1994), 509–513.

5 The text of the decree may be found in A. Mazyrin and O. Kosik, “Ukaz Zamestitelia Patriarshego Mestobliustitelia mitropolita Nizhegorodskogo Sergiiia (Stragorodskogo) i Vremennogo pri nem Patriarshego Sviashchennogo Sinoda o pominovennii za bogosluzheniiami 21 oktiabria 1927 g.,” in “Vsled za iiul’skoi Deklaratsiei,” *Bogoslovskii sbornik*, Sv. Tikhonovskogo Instituta, No. 9 (2002): 300–301. A facsimile of the decree is on p. 302.

regime. The churchmen, on the other hand, saw the situation more in terms of religious schism, a question of ecclesiastical rather than secular authority, one that threatened the purity of Church life and doctrine. Using liturgical commemorations as the focal point, this essay will examine both perspectives.

1 Prelude to the Schism

On 24 November/7 December 1927, a meeting took place in the Leningrad apartment of Protopresbyter Feodor Andreev. The meeting was attended by bishops and clergy not just from Leningrad, but from Moscow and the Kiev-Pechorskaia Lavra. They wrote letters detailing a number of complaints to Metropolitan Sergii (Stragorodskii). The meeting's attendees objected to a number of Sergii's policies, including his frequent transfer of bishops and, perhaps most strongly, his decree of 8/21 October 1927. The question about breaking with Sergii was raised at the meeting; however, it was decided to send a delegation to Moscow to deliver the complaints in person and talk things over.

Several days later, a delegation consisting of three clergymen and one lay representative from Leningrad diocese arrived in Moscow, where Sergii cordially received them at his quarters. He read over the letters carefully and discussed each issue with the delegation.⁶ The lay representative took minutes, and reported the discussion about commemoration as follows:

“Well, what is so special about the fact that we commemorate the authorities?” asked Metropolitan Sergii. “Once we have recognized them, we support them and pray for them. Didn’t people pray for the tsar, Nero and others?”

“But can one pray for the Antichrist?” we asked.

“No, you cannot.”

“Do you guarantee that this is not the regime of the Antichrist?”

“I guarantee it. The Antichrist is supposed to be in power for three and a half years, but in this case ten years have already passed.”⁷

⁶ He followed up with a letter dated 11 December 1927 that responded to the questions. See “Otvet mitropolita Sergiia (Stragorodskogo) delegatsii Petrogradskoi eparkhii,” in M.I. Ondtsov, *Russkie Patriarkhi XX veka. Sud’by Otechestva i Tserkvi na stranitsakh arkhivnykh dokumentov* (Moscow: RAGS, 1999), 265.

⁷ This is a reference to Revelation 13:5: “And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.”

“But surely this is the spirit of the Antichrist, one that does not confess Christ who came in the flesh?”

“That spirit has always existed from the time of Christ to our own day. I do not recognize this as the Antichrist!”

“Excuse us, Vladyka, you would not recognize him; only an elder would be able to do so. And since there is the possibility that this is the Antichrist, we will not pray for it”⁸

The delegation returned to Leningrad, and several weeks later, on 13/26 December 1927, they split officially from Metropolitan Sergii. They became known as the *Iosifliane* or *Iosiflianstvo*, named for Metropolitan Iosif (Petrovykh), who briefly headed Leningrad diocese but had been suddenly transferred by Sergii, a move that many considered unjust or even non-canonical. They were the largest of the *nepominaiushchie*, or “non-commemorator” movements that arose in reaction to Metropolitan Sergii’s actions.⁹

2 Background on Liturgical Commemorations

Liturgical commemorations, more formally known as the “liturgical diptychs,” or *pominoveniia* in Church Slavonic, are a part of the Divine Liturgy that tend to be overlooked.¹⁰ “Commemorations” can refer to different things in Orthodox

8 From the minutes reproduced in Ioann (Snychev), *Tserkovnye raskoly v russkoi tserkvi 20-kh i 30-kh godov xx stoletiya – Grigorianskii, Iaroslavskii, Iosiflianskii, Viktorianskii i drugie, ikh osobennosti i istoriia* (Samara: Samarskii dom pechati, 1997), 213–215. According to M.I. Shkarovskii, the lay delegate who recorded the conversation was I.M. Andreevskii, then a lecturer at Leningrad University. He emigrated to the West and wrote about the “catacomb church” in the late 1940s under the name I.M. Andreev. See *Iosiflianstvo: techenie v Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* (St. Petersburg: Memorial, 1999), 15–16.

9 I use the term non-commemorators (*nepominaiushchie*) as an umbrella term for all groups that opposed Sergii’s October 1927 decree on commemorations. It was actually an unofficial term coined by those within the movement, other branches of which included the *Viktoriane*, named for Bishop Viktor Ostrovodov of Viatka and Votkinsk; and the *Buevtsy*, named for Bishop Aleksii Bui, who were found in the Central Black Earth region. The term was later picked up by émigré and samizdat writers. See, for example, Lev Regel’son, *Tragediia Russkoi Tserkvi, 1917–1945* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1977), chapter 5. Official Soviet documents from the period did not use the term, instead referring to the groups as the “Leningrad opposition,” “Danilovskaia opposition,” and the like; sometimes they were collectively called the “right opposition.”

10 Originally, the term “diptychs” referred to two oblong planks of wood, bone or metal, which folded together like a bookbinding. The surfaces of the diptych boards were coated with wax, which made them easy to write or scratch on with a pointed steel stick or sty-

worship: there are commemorations of the living, the dead, martyrs, one's relatives and friends, etc.¹¹ There are also the commemorations of the ecclesiastical and secular authorities at certain points during the Divine Liturgy. These occur during the Litany of Peace, the Great Litany, at the Great Entrance, and in the litany before the Lord's Prayer, when names of the authorities are "proclaimed" or "commemorated" by the celebrant or deacon.

The idea of liturgical commemorations goes back to the lists of bishops that the various Churches compiled as proof of Apostolic continuity in the first centuries of Christianity. Writing in 180 AD, Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, argued that this succession of bishops is what distinguished the true Churches from heretical groups that could not trace their origin to the Apostles.¹² Such lists of bishops thus provided the basis for a Church's legitimacy and the authority of its ecclesiastical leaders.

Prayer for secular authorities in Christian worship also goes back to the early centuries of Christianity. Writing several years after Irenaeus, Tertullian spoke of the need to "pray ... for Emperors, for their ministers, and those in authority."¹³ The emperors and "those in authority" were not necessarily Christians, but, Tertullian explained, the end of the age "with its menace of hideous suffering" was delayed by the Roman Empire, and because Christians did not wish to experience this, they prayed for its postponement, which meant they prayed for the continuance of Rome and its emperors.¹⁴ The ruling sovereign, specifically

lus; essentially, they were notebooks used by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Diptych boards came to be used by the Christian Church to bind altar gospels and other sacred books in the fourth-fifth centuries; commemoration lists were sometimes placed on the inside flaps. Eventually, the term "diptych" came to be applied to the commemoration lists. Vladislav Tsypin, *protoierei, "Diptykh," Pravoslavie.ru*, 11 May 2011, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/46687.html>.

¹¹ My usage of the term "commemoration" (*pominanie*) is based largely on that of the Soviet secret police. I am afraid that places me in the category of those authors who, as Robert F. Taft says, "use the term 'diptychs' loosely for almost any type of liturgical prayer containing a list of names of those to be commemorated during the liturgy." See *The Diptychs* (Roma: Oriental Institute Press, 1991), 2.

¹² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 118. Irenaeus's own words may be seen in Book 111, chapter 3 in *Five Books of S. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, Against Heresies*, trans. John Keble, (Oxford: James Parker and Company, 1872), 206–207. Irenaeus provided the list of bishops from the Church of Rome, of which he was a part; he stated that because of space constraints, he did not provide the lists from other Churches.

¹³ Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, xxxix. 2, *Tertullian: Apology* Loeb Classical Library 250, trans. T.R. Glover (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 174–175.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxii. 1, 154–155.

the Byzantine emperor, began to be commemorated by name in the “diptychs of the living” of the liturgy at least by the time of Maximus the Confessor (d. 662). This practice was later applied to other local rulers such as the Russian tsar.¹⁵

Theologically, liturgical commemorations have no direct bearing on the Eucharistic celebration. However, their role in the Divine Liturgy has never been superfluous or merely ceremonial. They are not just remembrances of people in prayers at the Liturgy, but, as Taft put it, “the public proclamation of those with whom the local Church held communion.”¹⁶ In the case of the commemoration of the ruler’s name, such a public proclamation amounted to an endorsement, a recognition of his or her authority and legitimacy, one that the people assembled at religious services would hear. It was thus a statement of great political significance.

Perhaps nowhere was awareness of the political significance of commemorations more acute than in Russia. An anecdote from the reign of Empress Anna Ioannovna (1730–1740) illustrates how secular and ecclesiastical officials viewed the incorrect commemoration of the secular authority as an expression of political dissent and interacted to punish the guilty parties. Anna, the daughter of Ivan V, Peter I’s half-brother, came to power on 28 January/8 February 1730. In spite of receiving the official manifesto of her confirmation as Empress, Archbishop Lev (Iurlov) of Voronezh directed that the archdeacon commemorate the name of “our most pious Great Sovereign, the Empress and Grand Duchess Evdokiia Fedorovna,” Peter I’s first wife, with no mention of Anna, on the first Sunday of Great Lent.

What Lev had done was not just some isolated incident in a remote province, the Russian historian Anton Kartashev remarked, but expressed the political tendencies among certain circles within the Church at the time. Many bishops hated the modernizing changes that Peter had implemented and hoped that if Evdokiia could be put on the throne, they could be reversed. However, once the bishops in the capital received the news that Anna had been confirmed as Empress, they fell into line and dropped their opposition. Lev, who was evidently not as politically astute as his big city counterparts, was called in for questioning by Pashkov, the vice-governor of Voronezh, who was concerned that word would get to the capital about what had transpired and that he, Pashkov, would be blamed for inciting rebellion. Several months later, Lev was summoned before the Holy Synod for interrogation, handed over to

¹⁵ Taft, *Diptychs*, 168.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

a civilian court, and ultimately banished to a remote monastery on the White Sea after being deposed as a bishop and reduced to the status of an ordinary monk.¹⁷

3 Liturgical Commemorations as Political Dissent in the Early Soviet Era

Two hundred years later, Bolshevik officials also looked to liturgical commemorations as a barometer of political sentiment and even a potential tool for shaping the allegiance of ordinary believers. They made judgments about where clergy stood politically based on whom they did or did not commemorate. For example, in criticizing the Church in the days following the February Revolution, Boris Kandidov, an early anti-religious writer, noted that clergy in some cities had refused to read Nicholas II's abdication manifesto in their churches and continued to commemorate the Imperial family in their services. He interpreted this as one of the first signs of emerging counter-revolutionary activity among churchmen.¹⁸

Seeing the actions of the clergy as an organized political response at that time seems premature. It is true that technically, they were violating the Holy Synod's order issued on 7–8 March 1917, that in place of the commemoration for the tsar and his family prayers instead be offered "for the God-fearing Russian Power and its pious Provisional Government."¹⁹ Telegrams directing the changes were sent to bishops in every diocese; the changes were also published in church newspapers. However, given the chaos of the time and broken communication lines, it is possible that many clergy simply did not receive the information in a timely manner. In one case, a bewildered priest sought

¹⁷ Anton Vladimirovich Kartashev, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi tserkvi*, vol. 2 (Paris: YMCA Press, 1959), 399–400. Evdokia Feodorovna, who was Peter I's first wife, was still living and had long since gone to a monastery. Kartashev noted that Lev did not use Evdokiia's monastic name, Elena, but her secular name.

¹⁸ Boris Pavlovich Kandidov, *Tserkov' i fevral'skaiia revoliutsiia – klassovaia pozitsiia Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v period fevral'-avgusta 1917 g. Materialy i ocherki* (Moscow: Ogiz, gosudarstvennoe antireligioznoe izdatel'stvo, 1934), 19–20. Kandidov does not mention the cities where this took place.

¹⁹ "Telegramma s rasporiazheniem pervenstvuiushchego chlena Sv. Sinoda mitropolita Kievskogo i Galitskogo Vladimira (Bogoiavlenskogo), 6 marta 1917 g.," "Iz opredeleniia Sv. Sinoda No. 1226 'Ob izmeneniiakh v tserkovnom bogosluzhenii v sviazi s prekrashcheniem pominoveniia tsarstvovavshego doma' ot 7–8 marta 1917 g.," in Mikhail A. Babkin, comp. *Rossiiskoe dukhovenstvo i sverzhenie monarkhii v 1917 godu. Materialy i arkhivnye dokumenty po istorii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi tserkvi* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 27, 29.

advice on the proper commemoration from a commissar of the Provisional Government, complaining he did not know what to do because, he claimed, his superiors (the bishops) would not give him instructions.²⁰

Outside of Russia, it appears that émigré churches continued to commemorate the monarchy into the 1920s. In a manual meant for educating youth about the Orthodox services that was published in Paris in 1921, it is stated that during the Great Entrance, the celebrants “pray first for the Sovereign Emperor and His House, then for His Holiness the Patriarch, the local bishop, those present and all Orthodox Christians.”²¹ It is not clear whether this was an intentional political statement by the émigré churchmen, many of whom still held the hope that the Romanov dynasty would soon be restored in Russia, or whether the book was pulled off the shelf and hastily reprinted for use among the burgeoning émigré church community in Europe without any attempt at updating.²²

Of course, the commemoration or memorialization of the tsar and the Imperial family inside Soviet Russia during the 1920s and 1930s could have only a political meaning in the eyes of the secret police. An OGPU report from the Central Black Earth region in 1930 noted that Nicholas II’s name was memorialized in secret gatherings outside of services.²³ Although memorial prayers for the dead were not the same thing as commemorating living rulers, they were still of concern to the authorities, because this meant the monarchy had not been forgotten.²⁴

²⁰ A.V. Peshekhanov, *Pervye nedeli*, in S.A. Alekseev, comp., *Fevral’skai revoliutsii* (Moscow, Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1925), 451. Peshekhanov himself was likely the commissar to whom the priest turned.

²¹ Dmitrii Sokolov, *Uchenie o Bogosluzhenii Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* (Paris: Izdanie prikhodskogo soveta Russkoi tserkvi v Parizhe, 1921), 48.

²² There was in fact considerable discussion in émigré circles during the early to mid-1920s about restoration of the Romanov dynasty in Russia. Two main factions arose: Russian monarchists in Germany supported Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich for the throne, while monarchists in France favored Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich. Monthly OGPU summaries kept the Bolshevik leadership advised about the activities of monarchists abroad, paying close attention to possible ties with groups inside the Soviet Union. For examples of the summaries, see the heading “Antisovetskie partii i gruppirovki. Monarkhisty,” in volume 2 (1924) of G.N. Sevost’ianov, A.N. Sakharov, et al., eds. “Sovershenno Sekretno”: *Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922–1934 gg.)*, (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2013).

²³ “OGPU,” or the *Ob’edinnoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie SSSR*, was established on 15 November 1923. It replaced the GPU, which in turn had replaced the Cheka in February 1922. “O vnesudebnykh organakh,” *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, no. 10 (1989): 80–81.

²⁴ “Doklad PP OGPU po TsChO o kontrrevoliutsionnykh tserkovnykh i sektantskikh organizatsiiaakh i gruppakh, likvidirovannykh PP OGPU po TsChO v 1930 g. 15 oktiabria 1930 g.,” *Lubianka-Stalinu*, vol. 8, 1502.

Officially, the memorial prayer (*zaupokoinoe molenie*) “For the pious tsars and tsaritsas” had been removed from the augmented litany by the Patriarchal Church in September 1923. This was part of Patriarch Tikhon’s agreement to uphold a policy of political neutrality for the Church following his release from imprisonment.²⁵ Bolshevik authorities may have hoped that by removing any mention of the monarchy from the Liturgy, their memory would be expunged from people’s consciousness.

At the same time, they may have reasoned that they could replace that memory and win the allegiance of believers by changing commemoration of the secular authorities. The same instruction that ordered removal of the memorial prayer directed that “By order of His Holiness ... the following prayer for the Government of the Russian Soviet Republic shall be included in the Divine services ... [At the Great Litany] ‘For the God-fearing Russian land and its authorities we pray to the Lord’” (*O Bogokhranimo strane Rossiistei i o vlasti eia – Gospodu pomolimisia*).²⁶ The new formula was worked out by Tikhon’s assistant, Bishop Ilarion (Troitskii), with Evgenii Tuchkov (1892–1957), the head of the secret department of GPU which dealt with Church matters, looking over his shoulders. Tuchkov was bothered by the phrase “for her authorities” (*o vlasti eia*), which he felt was too general: “Why isn’t it noted here that we are talking about the ‘Soviet’ authorities?! Perhaps you are thinking about your ‘White Guard’ authorities and encouraging prayer for [Grand Duke] Nikolai Nikolaevich and his henchmen?!” he complained. However, Ilarion was able to persuade Tuchkov that the word “Soviet” could not be used in the liturgical formula, because it could not be rendered into Church Slavonic.²⁷

To ensure that the new commemoration was being properly implemented, the secret police monitored church services. However, according to Protopresbyter Vasilii Vinogradov, who was chairman of the Moscow Diocesan Council at the time, they monitored only those services over which the Patriarch himself presided, and sometimes those of other senior hierarchs. Local parish clergy approached the new commemoration in different ways: in some places, it was proclaimed only once, early in the service, before the majority of worshippers

²⁵ “Instruktsiia moskovskogo eparkhial’nogo soveta blagochinnym Moskovskoi eparkhii, 25 sentiabria 1923 g.” in Vladimir Vorob’ev et al., eds, *Sledstvennoe delo patriarkha Tikhona: sbornik dokumentov po materialam Tsentral’nogo arkhiva FSB RF* (Moscow: Pravoslavnyi Sviato-Tikhonovskii Bogoslovskii Institut, 2000), 359.

²⁶ Ibid., 358–359.

²⁷ V. Vinogradov, *O nekotorykh vazhneishikh momentakh poslednego perioda v zhizni i deiatel’nosti patriarkha Tikhona* (Munich: n.p., 1959), 20.

arrived at church. In other places, the deacon substituted a similar-sounding phrase: “*O strane Rossiiskoi i oblastekh ee*” (instead of *o strane Rossiiskoi i o vlasti eia*). After a time, the new commemoration almost completely disappeared, at least in Moscow parishes.²⁸

Vinogradov remarked that Tikhon had issued the decree with a clear conscience, knowing that there was nothing about commemorating the secular authorities, Bolshevik or otherwise, that went against Church doctrine. The Patriarchal administration defended prayer for the Soviet government as a whole, reasoning that it might consist not just of godless communists, but also secretly believing Christians. They looked to the Eucharistic prayer of St. Basil the Great (†379): “Remember Lord, every rule and authority and our brethren in the palace” as justification for their action.²⁹ Some disputed this explanation, arguing that commemoration of the Soviet regime during the Divine Liturgy was like a fly in the ointment.³⁰ Most of Tikhon’s supporters, however, did not express their disapproval openly, and, as noted, the commemoration soon disappeared and became a non-issue.

Although the authorities’ concern over commemorations died down, secret police reports continued to be filled with condemnatory descriptions of the behavior of the “Tikhonites.” The reports alleged that the Tikhonites, or “reactionary clergy,” as they were also called, had been engaged in a constant struggle with the Renovationists, considered to be the progressive clergy, for control of the Church since 1923. Following Sergii’s July 1927 Declaration, the Patriarchal Church, which had been termed the “Tikhonite” Church, morphed into the “Sergiian” Church, and its clergy were now presumed to be loyal to the Soviet government. The term “reactionary clergy” was applied to those holdouts who resisted Sergii’s decrees, including the one directing the commemoration of the secular authorities.

The formula for commemoration that Metropolitan Sergii decreed in October 1927 was nearly identical to Tikhon’s 1923 formulation.³¹ In fact, Sergii noted that he was actually enforcing what the late Patriarch and his Holy Synod had already decreed with regard to commemoration of the secular authorities. No doubt aware of potential resistance, he emphasized that such commemoration

²⁸ Ibid., 20–21.

²⁹ Ibid., 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 18.

³¹ At the Great Litany, the Sergiian formulation read: “For our country and its authorities we pray to the Lord” (*O strane nashei i o vlastekh eia Gospodu pomolimsia*). See Mazyrin and Kosik, “Ukaz,” 301.

was “in accordance with the Apostolic counsel (1 Timothy 2:2).”³² However, he encountered far more opposition than Tikhon had.

From the viewpoint of the Bolshevik authorities, the obvious explanation for this was political. Convinced that counter-revolutionary activity by churchmen was on the rise, the secret police began paying more attention to religious-based dissent at the grass-roots level during the late 1920s. After Sergii issued his October 1927 decree, they recorded incidents of refusal by “reactionary clergy” to use his formula for commemoration, or even outright distortion of it, in their monthly reports to the Bolshevik leadership. The March 1928 OGPU summary, for example, provided the following report: “The most reactionary clergy distort the commemoration formula, turning it into a prayer ‘for the overthrow of the God-hating kingdom and regime and the liberation of the faithful from their violence.’”³³ Such actions were not unlike those of isolated clergy following Tikhon’s 1923 decree, but now the secret police were monitoring not just senior hierarchs, but ordinary parish priests as they celebrated Divine Liturgy.

In 1927–1928, the vast majority of all Orthodox parishes, about 70%, were under Sergii; 16% were Renovationist; 5% Grigorian (the Provisional Higher Church Council); and 8–9% were affiliated with “autocephalists.”³⁴ The Renovationists, along with the Grigoriants, a group founded by Archbishop Grigori (Iatskovskii) of Ekaterinburg at the time of Metropolitan Petr’s arrest in December 1925, enjoyed legal recognition by the Bolsheviks, and therefore were assumed to be loyal to the Soviet state. Following Sergii’s July 1927 Declaration, the clergy of the “Sergian” Church were also considered loyal. The “autocephalists,” which included the “Leningrad opposition” and similar groups, were labelled as reactionary clergy who agitated against the Soviet state.

Although relatively small in number, their opposition had appeared at a critical juncture in the construction of the communist state, as the Bolsheviks were preparing to implement the First Five Year Plan, a crash program for industrialization. At almost the same time, Stalin had begun arguing the need for total collectivization of agriculture to feed the workers who would achieve that goal.

³² 1 Timothy 2:1–2 reads: “I urge that supplications, prayers intercessions, and thanksgivings be made ... for kings, and for all that are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectable in every way.”

³³ “Obzor politicheskogo sostoianiya SSSR za mart 1928 (po dannym Ob”edinennogo gosudarstvennogo politicheskogo upravleniya),” in “Sovershenno Sekretno”: Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922–1934 gg.), vol. 6 (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2013), 195.

³⁴ Figures cited by M.V. Shkarovskii, *Iosifianstvo: tchenie v Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* (St. Petersburg: Memorial, 1999), 34. The Renovationists, along with the Grigoriants, were backed by the Bolsheviks, and therefore assumed to be loyal to it, as were Sergian clergy following his July Declaration.

The largest, most vocal branch of the non-commemorator movement had its origin in an urban setting, but it spread quickly to the countryside.

Bolshevik officials were concerned about the movement's influence on the peasants. During their investigation of the Buevtsy branch of non-commemorators in the Central Black Earth region in 1930, the secret police uncovered a brochure entitled "What the Orthodox Christian Should Know," which they claimed was "intended for the mass of peasant believers." According to the brochure, the October Revolution had "perverted the divine order," the rightful one being a monarchy, and therefore "it [was] not possible to recognize the established regime as the lawful authority."³⁵ It was a dangerous piece of propaganda, which the authorities used to justify their assault against the religious "counter-revolutionaries."

During the early 1930s, the secret police liquidated what they termed the "centers" of the various non-commemorator groups. They executed, imprisoned or exiled the hierarchs and clerical and lay leaders. Nonetheless, small pockets of non-commemorators, often termed the "true Orthodox Christians" in OGPU and NKVD investigative files, persisted well into the 1930s and beyond. Many rank-and-file members followed their leaders into the GULAG, some serving multiple prison sentences over a number of decades.

4 Religious Schism

Although the non-commemorators are usually defined in terms of their opposition to the Soviet state, political opposition does not fully explain the motivations of all those who rejected Sergii's decrees. A number of his opponents explained that while they were in fact loyal to the Soviet state, they did not accept Sergii as head of the Church, and therefore rejected his policies and in some cases broke communion with him. Soviet churchmen and Russian church historians in recent times have viewed these breaks in terms of religious schism.

The major issue here was ecclesiastical authority, which was reflected in debates over which hierarch should be commemorated as first primate of the Orthodox Church during the Liturgy as well as who had the right to make pol-

³⁵ "Doklad PP OGPU po TsChO o kontrrevoliutsionnykh tserkovnykh i sektantskikh organizatsiakh i gruppakh, likvidirovannykh PP OGPU po TsChO v 1930 g. 15 oktiabria 1930 g.," *Lubianka-Stalinu*, vol. 8, 1460. OGPU officials ascribed authorship of the brochure to the "Imiaslavtsy [Name-glorifier] nerve-center," which they alleged had formed a conspiracy with the non-commemorators.

icy for the Church. Russian hierarchs looked to Church canons more than a thousand years old to argue their positions and justify their actions against a backdrop of revolution, civil war, and a new kind of state that was hostile to all religion. Some might question the wisdom of splitting hairs over these questions at such a perilous time for the Church, but the hierarchs were determined that although its existence was in grave danger, there were certain aspects of Orthodoxy that could not be compromised.

Following Tikhon's death under mysterious circumstances in March 1925, a period of confusion over ecclesiastical authority had ensued in the Patriarchal Church. Metropolitan Sergii emerged as its head in 1927, but a number of hierarchs and clergy questioned his authority to assume that position. He was the deputy to Metropolitan Petr (Polianskii) of Krutitskii, the third of the Patriarchal *locum tenentes* whom Tikhon had appointed prior to his death.³⁶ The first two appointees were in exile at the time of Tikhon's death, so Petr assumed the position of Patriarchal *locum tenens*. Foreseeing the possibility of his own arrest, which in fact occurred in December 1925, he appointed Sergii his deputy. Many hierarchs and clergy argued that only a Patriarch had the authority to designate a *locum tenens* to fulfill his duties; therefore, they did not consider Sergii's position to be canonical.³⁷

36 The three, in order, were Metropolitan Kirill (Smirnov) of Kazan', Metropolitan Agafangel (Preobrazhenskii) of Iaroslavl' and Metropolitan Petr (Polianskii) of Krutitskii. See "Zaveshchatel'noe raspiorizhenie Sviateishego Patriarkha Tikhona, na sluchai svoei konchiny, o preemstve Vysshei Tserkovnoi Vlasti, 25.12.1924 (07.01.1925)," in *Akty Sviateishego Tikhona*, 340, 344.

37 The All-Russian Council issued a determination on 28 July/10 August 1918, stating that the Holy Synod and Supreme Church Council were the bodies responsible for designating a Patriarchal *locum tenens* in case the Patriarchal throne were to be vacated, a ruling which reflected Byzantine practice. See "Opredelenie Sviashchennago Sobora Pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi Tserkvi o mestobliustitele patriarshego prestola. 28 iulija (10 avgusta) 1918 goda," in *Sviashchennyi sobor Pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi tserkvi, Sobranie opredelenii i postanovlenii. Vypusk chetveryi. Prilozhenie k "deianiam" vtoroe*. (Moscow: Izdanie Sobornago Soveta, 1918), 7–8. However, months before this determination was issued, it was recognized that extraordinary measures might be required to ensure continuity of the Church's governance, particularly after the publication of the Bolshevik Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State on 23 January 1918. Two days later, Prince E. Trubetskoi presented a proposal at a general session of the Council recommending that the Patriarch be given the power to appoint a Patriarchal *locum tenens* on his own to assume all his rights and duties until a new Patriarch could be elected. The Council adopted the proposal, and Patriarch Tikhon was informed. He first made use of the ruling to appoint Metropolitan Agafangel his *locum tenens* following his arrest in May 1922. See *Sviashchennyi Sobor Pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi Tserkvi. Deiania. Kniga vi. Deiania LXVI–LXXVII* (Moscow: Izdanie Sobornago Soveta, 1918), 73–74.

Some of Sergii's opponents even considered him a heretic. One of the instructions in the 8/21 October decree was that Sergii's name be commemorated along with Metropolitan Petr's.³⁸ In a February 1928 document, the *Iosifliane* claimed that this constituted a violation of canons 13–15 of the First-and-Second Council of Constantinople (861), according to which two names could not be proclaimed for the same position.³⁹

Another extremely unpopular component of the 8/21 October decree was its ban on commemoration of diocesan hierarchs who were in exile.⁴⁰ Some considered this a betrayal on Sergii's part. During discussion of the issue at his December 1927 meeting with the Leningrad diocese representatives, Sergii tried to justify his action by pointing out that commemoration of Tikhon's name at the Divine Liturgy had also been prohibited following his release from house arrest in 1923. This went back to a circular issued by the People's Commissariat of Justice that banned public mention of Patriarch Tikhon, because he was still under indictment for alleged "crimes against the state."⁴¹

³⁸ "For the Holy Orthodox Patriarchs, for our Patriarchal Locum Tenens His Holiness Metropolitan Petr, for His Holiness Metropolitan Sergii and for His Holiness our Metropolitan (Archbishop or Bishop) (name) (whose diocese it is, or whoever is ruling it at present) (etc) (O Sviateishikh Patriarshekh pravoslavykh, o Patriarshem Mestobliustitele nashem Preosviashchennom Mitropolite Petre, o Preosviashchennom Mitropolite Sergii i o Preosviashchennom Mitropolite (Arkhiereiske ili Episkepe) nashem (imia-rek) (ch'ia eparkhia ili kto eiu upravliaet v dannoe vremia) ...)." Mazyrin and Kosik, 301.

³⁹ Point vi of "Kanonicheskoe obosnovanie 'iosifliani' svoego otkhoda ot Zamestitelia Patriarshego Mestobliustitelia i ego Vremennogo Patriarshego Sviashchennogo Sinoda (tezisy)," *Akty Sviateishego Patriarkha Tikhona*, 585. Translation of the canons in question may be found in "The Seventeen Canons of the So-Called First-and-Second Council held in the Temple of the Holy Apostles Interpreted," in *The Rudder of the Orthodox Catholic Church: The Compilation of the Holy Canons by Saints Nicodemus and Agapius*, trans. D. Cummings (Southend-on-Sea, Essex, England: W.H. Houldershaw, 1983), 469–471.

⁴⁰ Ioann, *Tserkovnye raskoly*, 203.

⁴¹ The People's Commissariat of Justice issued a circular on 8 December 1923 in response to queries it claimed to have received from localities about whether the "public honoring of persons who have been convicted or who are under indictment for committing serious crimes against the state were a punishable offense, in particular, in relation to citizen Belavin (Tikhon)." The circular confirmed that such "public honoring," which meant using the Patriarch's name during worship services "as part of prayer or in sermons," was a punishable offense, presumably for the clergy who spoke it. Furthermore, the circular noted, such usage could constitute the basis for canceling an agreement with a group of believers on continued use of a church building for worship. "Tsirkuliar NKU o zapreshchenii pomianii v publichnykh molitvakh lits, osuzhdennykh ili nakhodishchikhsia pod sudom za sovershenie tiazhkikh gosudarstvennykh prestuplenii 8 dekabria, 1923," *Sledstvennoe delo Patriarkha Tikhona*, 859–860.

After noting that Tikhon had gone along with the ban, Sergii reluctantly revealed that he had also been under pressure from the authorities to order termination of commemoration of Metropolitan Petr. He remarked, “If the authorities order it, what can you do?” Protopresbyter Vasilii Veriuzhskii retorted that Tikhon, as Patriarch, could make the decision as to whether he should be commemorated or not; Sergii, however, was not in a similar position to abolish Petr’s commemoration.⁴²

To have done so would have put Sergii in violation of the 15th canon of the First-and-Second Council of Constantinople for failure to commemorate his superior.⁴³ Sergii was very familiar with the contents of the canon and the consequences of defying it.⁴⁴ He convinced Tuchkov that if he, Sergii, were to order termination of Petr’s commemoration, that would constitute a gross violation of the canon, causing the Orthodox to equate him with the Renovationists, which would lead to a widespread break with him.⁴⁵ The Bolsheviks, not wishing to jeopardize Sergii’s position, which gave them a degree of control over the majority of religious believers in the country, backed off their demand to drop Petr’s name. The need to observe the ancient Church canons trumped the secular law of the communists, at least for the moment.

5 Conclusion

By the mid to late 1930s, it made little difference whether or not the Orthodox clergy commemorated the Soviet authorities in a proper manner during services or if Metropolitan Sergii’s position was canonically sound. At that point, the Bolsheviks considered the expression of religion in any form to be political

42 Protoierei Vladislav Tsyplin, *Russkaia tserkov'* 1925–1938 (Moscow: Sretenskii monastyr', 1999), 151.

43 Canon 15 of the First and Second Council of Constantinople (861AD) reads, “In case any Presbyter or Bishop or Metropolitan dares to secede or apostatize from the communion of his own Patriarch, and fails to mention the latter’s name in accordance with custom duly fixed and ordained, in the Divine [Liturgy] ... the holy Council has decreed that this person shall be held an alien to every priestly function if ... he be convicted of having committed this transgression.” *Rudder*, 470–471.

44 It was one of the canons Sergii invoked against Metropolitan Agafangel when the latter made a bid to assume the position of Patriarchal *locum tenens* after his return from exile in 1926. Sergii threatened to convene an ecclesiastical court to remove Agafangel as the head of Iaroslavl’ diocese if he refused to commemorate Petr as the Patriarchal *locum tenens*. Ioann, *Tserkovnye raskolы*, 134–135.

45 Aleksandr Mazyrin, *Vysshie ierarkhi o preemstve vlasti v Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi v 1920-kh–1930-kh godakh* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo PSTGU, 2006), 350.

dissent and acted harshly to suppress it. The vast majority of hierarchs, regardless of whether they were Sergiian, *Iosifiane* or even Renovationist, had been imprisoned, exiled, or shot.

The Russian Church itself was held together during what was perhaps the most difficult period in its existence by that most fragile of ties, the commemoration of the imprisoned Metropolitan Petr as primate of the Russian Church, by Sergi's supporters and opponents. Even the émigré churches, the Karlovatskii Sobor and the Evlogians, commemorated Petr, thus achieving unity of a sort among jurisdictions of the Church that had fallen out with each other. Sergii himself continued to commemorate Petr long after he suspected the Patriarchal *locum tenens* was no longer alive.⁴⁶

46 Protopresbyter Vladimir Vorob'ev, Introduction to M.E. Gubonin, *Kifa: Patriarshii mestobliustitel' sviashchennomuchenik Petr, mitropolit Krutitskii (1862–1937). Materialy po novaishei istorii Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi* (Moscow: Pravoslavnyi Sviato-Tikhonovskii Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2012), 9. Petr was executed in 1937.