

# Documents

## German Intelligence Reports

*Translated by Keith Armes*

*The following extracts from German intelligence reports are published for the first time. These complete the selection printed in RCL Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 31-37. An introductory article to these documents, "German Intelligence: Religious Revival in Soviet Territory" by Wassili Alexeev and Keith Armes, also appeared in RCL Vol. 5, No. 1 (pp. 27-30). These documents provide information about the religious revival in German-occupied areas of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. The original text is available on microfilm and can be obtained through the Committee for the Study of War Documents, American Historical Association, Washington D.C. Before each extract, we print the reference number and date of each report, as well as the page number from which extracts have been taken. Ed.*

### KIEV AND THE UKRAINE (No. 120, 21 October 1941, pp. 8-11) Church Life

First of all a brief overview of the development of the anti-church struggle under Bolshevik rule: until 1924 the communists in the Ukraine in general took few measures against the Church. The first attempts to combat the Church systematically took place between 1924 and 1926. Amongst other things, it was proved in a scientific way, by means of public debates in which scientists participated, that the teaching of the Church is false and delusory. These measures

were not, however, especially successful. On the other hand certain innovative tendencies began within the Church itself; in the first place the liturgy and the fasts were to be abolished. The "Reformers", as these innovators called themselves, were supported by the government. The priests belonging to this innovative movement became state officials. Very often they held a political post as well as exercising their priestly profession. However, they often carried weapons (pistols) in public and this external circumstance alone contributed to their not being able to win the trust of the population, although they used Ukrainian to make their teaching completely understandable to the people.

In 1927 began the public persecution of the priesthood as a whole. A high proportion were sentenced at that time. In 1931 the "Reformers" mentioned above were also included in this persecution, even though they had enjoyed until then the support of the government. Churchgoers were watched and punished and everywhere churches were closed. Nevertheless occasionally a church remained open in a town for the time being. Village people would sometimes come distances of over a hundred kilometres in order to attend the town churches which had remained open. However, the pressure became stronger and stronger, and most of the priests were exiled or killed. Only a small proportion remained at liberty in other

professions. The churches were all closed without exception. Despite this a certain amount of secret activity on the part of the Church still continued – more pronounced in the countryside, less so in the towns. Icons were secretly revered, baptisms were secretly performed by sextons (*Küster*), and the old church festivals were celebrated clandestinely. Frequently even communists had their children secretly baptised, soldiers secretly celebrated Easter, and so on. The NKVD naturally used every possible means to combat such attempts. Thus in Kirovo the NKVD had a priest as paid collaborator who informed on every attempt at secret church activity and delivered the participants into the hands of the NKVD. It has been observed that everywhere today the older people are firmly attached to their old churches: 70–80% are Orthodox, the rest being divided between the other Churches (Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Evangelical), while at the same time sects such as the Baptists and the Stundists also play a role, especially in the villages of the Odessa region which have German colonies. These sects, however, have lost in some cases a great many of their members.

No efforts directed towards the creation of a united Russian church have been observed; the only goal is rather a united Ukrainian church. There were extraordinarily large crowds at the first services held after the reopening of the church [sic]. People took part even in the field services of the German Wehrmacht, mainly however the older population. Although none of the people understood German, it was quite evident how deeply moved they were. The population very speedily made the decision to hold their own services in the churches, which were quickly restored, even though the necessary accessories, such as vestments, monstrances and incense, were frequently lacking. The numbers attending were great everywhere, especially since the reopening of, the Church was seen as an external sign of regained freedom. With respect to the younger generation a rough estimate would be that 50% think in the old church way as a result of their home upbringing and are at least so minded that they will most probably become church members, whereas for the re-

maining half the concept of the Church and in some cases even the concept of God is entirely alien, so that it is improbable that they will eventually become members.

In the opinion of the priests it would be advisable to preserve the old forms for the time being and only later, after a certain time has passed, to introduce innovations – for example to change from Old Church Slavonic to Ukrainian as the language of the Church. Firstly, the older age-groups are used to this type of service: a sudden change would be received with mistrust, since memories of the "Reformers" are still very strong. Secondly, the priests themselves often do not speak perfect Ukrainian, and thirdly the necessary books in Ukrainian are unavailable. It is the aim of all [they say] to make Ukrainian the language of the Church throughout the Ukraine. The Ukrainian language is a means of bringing up the population in an Ukrainian way.

#### SMOLENSK AREA

(No. 122, 23 October 1941, p. 3)

#### Church questions

According to unanimous reports from the entire area of the Action Group [B] (*Einsatzgruppe*) a growing attendance at Greek Orthodox churches can be observed. At first it was mainly only women and older men who participated in the services, but now young people as well are taking part, even former Komsomol members and relatives of leading communists. It is reported from Velish that a number of younger Greek Orthodox priests, who had graduated from seminaries shortly before the Bolshevik Revolution and had never in fact served as priests, now plan to take up the priestly profession. In the Vitebsk area it has been observed that almost the entire population has begun to observe strictly the church festivals, with the result that communications between the German authorities and the local civil authorities have been impeded.

#### KIEV

(No. 130, 7 November 1941, p. 20)

President Tiso [of Slovakia] visited Kiev on 3 November 1941 and paid a visit to the Lavra monastery. He arrived with his suite at the monastery at about 11.40 and left the monastery square around

12.30. A few minutes before 14.30 there was a small explosion inside the monastery. One of the police guards caught sight of three fleeing figures: they were shot dead. A few minutes later an enormous explosion followed which destroyed the entire building of the monastery. The explosive must probably have been placed in position earlier. It was only thanks to the thorough cordonning off and careful guarding of the entire building that the detonation did not take place earlier. Evidently the act is to be seen as an attempt on the life of President Tiso. The three apparent perpetrators could not be identified since they carried no identity papers of any sort.

## MARIUPOL, UKRAINE

(No. 141, 3 December 1941, pp. 9, 14)

[The report states that there had been originally 13 churches and six synagogues in the Mariupol district.]

Some of the churches were closed in 1925, and the remainder were closed in 1930 and turned into grain-stores or places of amusement: the priests were arrested and imprisoned. Although at first, after the closing of the churches, baptisms, weddings etc. were held secretly, as a result of the strict surveillance and penalties which were imposed in recent years they inevitably came to an end.

## TAGANROG, UKRAINE

In the Taganrog district there were 17 churches. Of the 12 Greek Orthodox churches nine were closed between 1922 and 1938, of which some were destroyed and others used as grain-stores. Attempts by the government to turn churches into cinemas and theatres failed, since the population would not attend performances held in them. The remaining three churches were destroyed in 1938. The church furnishings supposedly were put into a museum. The Roman Catholic church was closed in 1938 and the building used as a children's library. The Lutheran church was used from 1935 on to house a joiner's shop. The Armenian church was employed from 1934 on as a sculptor's studio. The two local Adventist and Baptist prayer-houses were also closed and used for other purposes.

The Soviet authorities set up an aviation institute in the Jewish synagogue. The population, in particular the parish councils, petitioned the Central Committee about the closing of the churches, but the result was that reprisals were taken against the petitioners. [ . . . ]

The Union of the Godless in this district was really only a formal movement which had great difficulty striking root. After attending meetings people usually could not see what the point of the lecture had been.

## SMOLENSK AREA

(No. 145, 12 December 1941, pp. 2, 9-10, 12)

[The population was happy not to have to celebrate the Seventh of November, the Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.]

On the other hand the desire was expressed that permission be given to celebrate the church festivals such as Christmas and Easter. The view here is that it would undoubtedly have a good effect on morale if a Christmas holiday were to be granted as far as possible in the rear areas and the appropriate decree utilized for propaganda purposes. [ . . . ]

[The report gives the following statistics on the church affiliations of the population of Smolensk:]

Greek Orthodox	24,100 (94.6%)
Catholic	849 (3.4%)
Lutheran	259 (1%)
Muslim	24 (0.1%)
Other religions	272 (1%)
No church	201 (0.8%)
[ . . . ]	

The formation of Greek Orthodox parishes is continuing to progress. On the occasion of the reopening of formerly closed churches there are frequently strong outbreaks of emotion amongst those present. In Viazma the population expressed its joy and gratitude to Wehrmacht personnel at the end of the first service. It is generally found that the Greek Orthodox clergy, consisting mostly of older persons of limited education, have a very positive attitude towards the German occupation and this attitude is expressed in their sermons. Consequently it can already be stated that the Greek Orthodox clergy may and will be viewed as a means of

achieving the inner pacification of the Russian territories.

#### CRIMEA

As yet no efforts by the churches at religious reconstruction have been observed; only in Karasubasar have the Romanians been especially active in this respect. So far approximately 200,000 [sic] persons have been baptised by Romanian priests in the above area, with Romanian soldiers acting as godfathers.

#### PSKOV AREA

(No. 162, 20 January 1942, pp. 8-9)

During Christmas religious life was particularly intense. The church celebrations and the illuminated Christmas trees in the public squares of the larger towns repeatedly gave rise to expressions of joy that thanks to German help Christmas, formerly forbidden by the Soviets, had now been restored to its rightful place.

Although in general the clergy refrains from any political activity, it has recently been noted that in sermons and prayers the Führer is not mentioned. In the former Soviet areas the churches are very well attended in the main, however, by older persons and children. In Pskov the six existing churches are overfilled at service time, as is also the one church in Luga, so that the establishment of a second church in Luga is under consideration.

#### BORISOV, BELORUSSIA

(No. 180, 13 March 1942, p. 6)

[The report gives the following statistics on the religious affiliations of the town's population:]

Greek Orthodox	19,317
Catholic	6,255
Protestant	130
Muslim	23
No religion: adherents of other churches	894

#### PSKOV AREA

(No. 190, 8 April 1942, pp. 9-10)

With regard to the Church no major changes have taken place. The number of services as well as the number of people attending have remained the same. In general it can be stated that the interest in religious life is very low as a

result of the extremely tight food situation and the cold. The sex and age composition of the churchgoers has also remained the same. In the course of the regular checking on services carried out by the Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*) and SD agents it was noted that the priests find in the planned abolition of the collective farms cause to give thanks to the German leadership and the victorious German Army.

(No. 6 - New Series, 5 June 1942, p. 5)

#### The Church Situation in Belorussia

In Belorussia the Great Russian question has already arisen openly and clearly with respect to church life. In order to split the Belorussians from the Great Russians in the area of religion as well and to make them independent, the Generalkommissar set up the Autocephalous Orthodox Belorussian National Church. It is now evident that this Belorussian National Church has become a catch basin for circles of the Great Russian clergy, although the civil administration did not fail to point out the need to follow a Belorussian line, and the leadership of the Autocephalous Church repeatedly asserted that they would not create any difficulties.

This Great Russian development within the Belorussian National Church has been carefully watched. Concrete documentary evidence has been collected about the former connections between the leadership of the Church and Archbishop Sergi of Moscow, who played a prominent role under the Soviets, (Metropolitan Panteleimon, Bishop Benedikt etc.) [sic] and Great Russian aspirations after the German liberation.

A difficult situation arose in that, on the one hand, for political reasons an Autocephalous Orthodox Belorussian National Church was to be founded, while, on the other hand, no Belorussian Orthodox priests were available to fit into this framework.

Various events and statements made by members of the Belorussian National Church have made it evident that Metropolitan Panteleimon and his circle have endeavoured to hinder the Belorussian development of the russified Autocephalous Orthodox Belorussian National Church. These Great Russians made skilful use of the opportunity to gather together, even though so far only within

a Belorussian Orthodox Church, and thus to a certain degree outwitted the civil administration. [ . . . ]

Apart from Metropolitan Panteleimon of Minsk, whose great Russian attitudes and church policy are beyond any doubt, Belorussian Orthodox priests repeatedly name Metropolitan Sergi, formerly of Riga and now of Vilna, the former *locum tenens* of Sergi in Moscow, as the driving force of the Great Russian Orthodox developments in the Church. Sergi has tried several times to get in touch with Panteleimon, and indeed to play a rôle in the build-up of the Autocephalous Orthodox Belorussian National Church. Sergi's secretary in Vilna, Brother Yevgeni, has stated to the priest Balai, one of Panteleimon's intimates, that the Autocephaly of the Belorussian Orthodox Church was a German creature of expediency that ran counter to the wishes of Great Russian Orthodoxy, and that one should wait and see how the war ended. Sergi is said to have tried to influence Panteleimon to block the further build-up of the Belorussian National Church. It is stated further that Panteleimon has connections with the Russian Committee in Warsaw.

(No. 11, 10 July 1942, pp. 9, 10)  
*[The report discusses the attitudes of the Belorussian intelligentsia.]*

These "indigenous elements" universally led an oppressed life under the Bolshevik system and have adopted a very non-committal attitude towards the Belorussian émigrés who poured into the Belorussian region from Warsaw, Prague, Berlin and other places after the arrival of the German troops. They do not attempt to conceal the fact that they had previously thought little of their Belorussian ethnic origin and have Great Russian views. They do not confess this openly, but it is clear from their basic attitudes. Whereas the indigenous intelligentsia is almost entirely Orthodox, having at present only a relatively limited conception of Belorussian nationalism or even of a Belorussian State, and is far superior to the "emigration" in numbers, but not in value, the "emigration" is almost entirely Catholic and is endeavouring to make "Belorussian politics" through the cliques into

which it is split up. (Not only the indigenous Belorussian intelligentsia, but also some former émigrés have Great Russian attitudes.)

While so far it could not be determined whether these Belorussians with Great Russian tendencies have connections with the Russian emigration in Germany or elsewhere in Europe, it is certain that part of them have the closest relationship with circles of Great Russian priests who belong to the Autocephalous Orthodox Belorussian National Church. These circles in their turn maintain connections with the Russian emigration in Warsaw.

#### DON REGION

(No. 24, 9 October 1942, p. 12)

After the liberation of the Don region the churches in many places were re-opened spontaneously, if the buildings were still intact and clergy were available. In this regard it is remarkable that all the requisite church furnishings, such as icons and vestments, were provided by the population in great quantities. While however the population, which is principally Cossack, is anti-Bolshevik and devoted to the Church in its basic attitudes, as can be seen from the large numbers of icons, which have been preserved by virtually every family, especially in the countryside, the churches are attended in the main only by the older generation, in particular by women, as well as small children. In addition to masses and thanksgiving services baptisms are being held in great numbers.

#### DON REGION

(No. 25, 16 October 1942, p. 11)

The opening of the churches continues to give rise to great joy among the population. In Novocherkassk a cathedral was recently reopened. This reopening, in which the District Kommandantur and the municipal administration participated, was celebrated by the local population with particularly great solemnity. The service was followed by a procession through the town in which thousands of inhabitants participated. It is reported from Novocherkassk that six churches have already been reopened. The number of churchgoers is relatively large, but the great majority are older people and children.

The esteem in which the clergy is held is growing likewise. While, for example, it could happen that earlier a priest was despised and shouted at, now he is greeted reverently by the population. Women are coming to the churches in crowds to have their children baptised. Not only babies are being baptised; in fact the age of baptism has been raised to 16.

The joy of the population at the *re-opening of the churches is so great* that frequently German soldiers are being asked by the mothers to act as *god-fathers* to their children. The inhabitants of Rostov as well were glad to hear of the reopening of the churches. *Thanksgiving prayers in churches and in the open air in public squares followed the news of religious freedom.* Churches and prayerhouses are being opened spontaneously not only in the bigger towns; in fact even in the most remote villages the priests are busily occupied restoring the churches and beginning services again.

#### PSKOV AREA

(No. 28, 6 November 1942, p. 7)

The number of churchgoers which had fallen during the summer months because of the need for agricultural labour, is now rising again in the entire Ingermanland. The Pskov mission has been asked several times to send priests. These requests could not however be granted in view of the shortage of priests until the present time.

The rural population has restored a number of destroyed churches, the people working collectively in their free time with the aid of the local administrations. Shortages of materials and labour prevent the repair of further churches. On 27 September 1942 the "Feast of the Elevation of the Cross" was celebrated in all the Pskov churches. A very large number of the inhabitants, including many men and young people, participated. However, the majority seemed to consist more of the curious than of genuine believers.

During the period since the liberation of Pskov until 15 September 1942 approximately 2,000 children aged one week to 16 have been baptised in the town's three churches, also 600 funerals and 20 weddings as well as other official church ceremonies have been held. The

three churches (Troitsky Cathedral with daily morning and evening services and the Dmitri and Varlaam churches with services two to three times a week) currently serve about 10,000 believers.

#### NORTHERN CAUCASUS

(No. 34, 18 December 1942, pp. 10-12)

During the reporting period a further consolidation, expansion and intensification of church life in most of the larger towns of the north Caucasus region was observed. Since 1923 the Russian Orthodox Church has been divided into two camps. The supporters of Patriarch Tikhon (*Tikhonovtsy*) were engaged in a struggle against the "Renewers" (*Obnovlentsy*), who rejected the old church and, it is claimed, worked in the interests of the Bolsheviks out of materialistic motives. In the Northern Caucasus in many cases the church of the Renewers did in fact become dominant as a result of Bolshevik support. However, after 1937 Bolshevik persecution (e.g. closing of churches) was directed against this new tendency as well. Their priests in part however deny that they received Bolshevik support. They claim that they were subjected to the same hostility as the other denominations. The support which had been promised was just an empty propaganda phrase of the Soviets. The priest in Labinskaya, a member of the Renewer movement, claims for example that since July 1936 he has had to pay 1,000 roubles in taxes and in addition 5,000 roubles in war taxes during the last year. With the revival in church activity the tensions between these two religious tendencies – the most powerful within the Russian Orthodox Church – have again become aggravated.

In Krasnodar, the religious centre of the Kuban, there have been serious clashes between the *Tikhonovtsy* and the *Obnovlentsy*. Both groups wanted to escape from the supervision of the municipal authorities and to set up their own centrally directed church administrations. These attempts were assisted indirectly by the fact that both the former, now removed, mayor and the new mayor are convinced supporters, one of the Tikhon Church and the other of the Renewed Church. Each of them tried to eliminate the influence of the opposed tendency as far as possible. Re-

cently the controversy has been mainly over the three churches which have become available; the Ekaterinsky Cathedral, the largest church in the town, was claimed by both parties. With the agreement of the District Kommandantur the cathedral was placed at the disposal of the old church, since it has the most supporters.

In Prokhladny the Renewers had possession of the cathedral, while the Tikhonovtsy only had a small church. The cathedral was closed in 1937. Despite this the Renewers are supposed to have been linked to the Bolsheviks. In general the *Obnovlentsy* clergy are branded by the population here, as elsewhere, as friendly to the Bolsheviks. In Pyatigorsk it was proved that one of the *Obnovlentsy* priests made use of his office to carry out spying for the NKVD. The priest Sergi Panchenchenko, who used to hold services in a private house after the closing of his church (1937) and fled from Prokhladny several months ago, was also an NKVD agent.

The rejection of the Renewers by the remainder of the priests is quite general and consequently disputes between the clergy have frequently been observed (e.g. in Anastasevskaya and Krasnodar). In reopening churches it will be necessary always to pay close attention to the tendencies which reveal themselves, unless the Renewed Church has already been obliged to cease activity, either under the pressure of public opinion or as the result of a prohibition (Pyatigorsk). Nevertheless even in the latter case surveillance of the Renewed Church tendency would still be necessary since it might continue to exist in illegal form. The question of whether a priest belongs to the old or the Renewed Church is often not easy to determine, for often – this is the view for instance of the Archbishop of Pyatigorsk – purely personal animosities play a role in accusations made by one priest against another.

The participation of the population in services continues to be very great and indeed, according to reports received, is constantly growing. In the main, services are attended by people of the older generation who have preserved their belief in the Church during the Bolshevik period. For the time being the Church's efforts are having less effect on the young people. However, this does

not mean that Bolshevik godlessness has struck root in the area. It is of note that the women's religious needs appear to be greater than the men's. The latter constitute approximately 20%, while the former, taken together with their children, amount to approximately 80% of the total number of churchgoers.

During the services great gratitude is repeatedly expressed to the German Wehrmacht, thanks to which free religious activity and the use of the churches have again been made possible. In Kislovodsk the District Kommandant and the local SD commander were invited by the mayor to receive bread and salt from the Russian Orthodox parish. About 2,000 people had gathered around the church. The priest and the church elders received the Germans and presented them with the symbolic gifts of bread, salt and flowers. They were then led over carpets about 100 metres across to a specially constructed altar. This path was densely strewn with flowers by the population. The priest's address was approximately as follows: "The people had during the Bolshevik time already abandoned belief and hope for an eventual liberation from their yoke. They had already prayed to God that the mountains of the Caucasus fall upon them and put an end to their sufferings and misfortunes. (Many burst into tears at this point). In the last extremity the German Reich and its victorious Werhmacht struck the Bolshevik enemy to the ground. In this way were we liberated. We thank the Führer (again great scenes of emotion, many crossing themselves) and offer bread and salt in token of our devotion." The District Kommandant replied to the priest's address briefly and with only weak effect. His words were in no wise commensurate with the sentiments of the population. After the speeches a mass was celebrated to the accompaniment of excellent choral music. By the end of the service the participants were completely overcome with emotion. The women wept, fell down before the two Germans and kissed their hands and feet. This experience and others similar to it show that, given a psychologically skilful direction of the religious feelings of the people, it would be possible to strongly influence the population in favour of the German cause, which

would be a means of furthering the pacification of the entire area.

Particularly lively church life, in which the young people are beginning to take greater part, has developed in the Cossack villages between the Manych and the Don. A similar situation prevails in the region of Belya Glina, whereas the rural areas to the southeast of the Manych are as yet not so active, although there also a corresponding demand exists among the population.

#### **AREAS OF BELORUSSIA DOMINATED BY SOVIET PARTISAN BANDS**

(No. 50, 16 April 1943, pp. 10, 15)

In these areas the bands pursue a decidedly pro-church policy and get the local population to erect new crosses and they even bring in Orthodox priests (so far only in a few cases). [ . . . ]

In accordance with Soviet propaganda and tactics the bands promise the population of the areas which they completely control the fulfilment of their wishes, such as the dividing up of the land – "Stalin will abolish the collective farm system, set up delivery centres for cattle and grain at which payment is made in cash or in promissory notes" – and the restoration of religion – "put up crosses and reopen churches, even import priests". Recently one of these bands appeared in a reopened church during a service, and the leader kneeled down before the priest and prayed aloud: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost! Brothers and sisters! God is and will be! We were for a while bewildered because we despised God. One must pray to God. Pray for us, for all fighters and partisans! Amen!"

# Soviet Jewish Affairs

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Number 2

Autumn 1976

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Published by the Institute of Jewish Affairs, 13/16 Jacobs's Well Mews, George Street, London W15 5PD

*The Journal appears twice a year, in spring and autumn.*

*Annual subscription: £3 or \$7.50 (air mail surcharge £2 or \$5).*

*Single issues £1.60 (\$4), with additional charges for air mail.*