

The Moscow Patriarchate, the Penal Organs of the USSR, and the Attempted Destruction of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church during the 1940's

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Abstract

(Українське резюме на ст. 92)

The following is an edited translation of an article published in our journal in 1993 (*Logos* 34, pp. 532-76). It is based on recently de-classified documents in the State Archives of the Russian Federation, St. Petersburg (formerly the Central State Archives of the October Revolution). The author describes the co-opting of the Moscow Patriarchate by Soviet state authorities – in particular, Stalin's meeting with the leadership of the Russian Church in September, 1943, and the creation of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. He then demonstrates the role of the Council and the NKVD in orchestrating the expansion of the Moscow Patriarchate throughout Western Ukraine, where five million Greco-Catholics were forced underground or absorbed into the Russian Church after the L'viv pseudo-Synod of 1946. In the author's opinion the recent inter-confessional strife between Orthodox and Catholics in Ukraine is essentially the fruit of Soviet state interference in Church affairs. Government sponsorship of one Church in an attempt to destroy another was bound to engender animosity among believers.

The translation was done by George Perejda, CSSR, and edited by Andrii Krawchuk and Peter Galadza. The original included far more editorializing on the part of the author. Some of this has been retained in the translation, first, to convey a sense of the author's style, and second, to indicate the painful nature of this subject.

Since the publication of Bilas' original article, an authoritative book on the same subject has appeared. See Bohdan Bociurkiw, *The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and the Soviet State, 1939-1950* (Edmonton - Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996).



This article is based on newly discovered Soviet archival documents. Until recently, it was believed that these documents, previously stored at the Central Archives, had been destroyed.¹ Our aim is to shed light on a little-known chapter of Soviet religious policy and to elucidate some of the hostilities among various denominations in Ukraine. We limit ourselves to the documentary evidence, and leave it to the reader to determine who stands to benefit today from the inter-confessional strife in Ukraine whose foundations – like a time-bomb – were laid back in the 1940's.²

¹ See *Аргументы и факты* 1989, n. 40, p. 4. The death of Fr. Aleksander Men has been linked with documents of a similar content: not long before his death, he received materials compromising higher church, Party-governmental, and Chekist circles. These documents, as *Аргументы и факты* was informed by a former co-worker of the Orthodox section of the Committee for National Security, were located in the dossier of Men, and disappeared immediately after a tragic attack by assailants, acting apparently on the orders of the Special Service. See also *Аргументы и факты* 1991, n. 39, p. 3.

² Bilas wrote this article in the early 1990's when Catholic-Orthodox strife was a major concern. Today, however, inter-Orthodox polemics overshadow the former problem. [Editor's note.]

Change of Fortune for the Russian Orthodox Church in 1943

On the eve of World War II, the Russian Orthodox Church was on the verge of complete liquidation. The outbreak of war and the subsequent shift in Soviet church policy from domination to courtesy was a godsend to the *locum tenens* of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Sergei Stragorodskii, and his followers. This major shift began with "an ordinary conversation." On 4 September 1943, when the tide of the war had turned and there were signs that the Red Army would be victorious, Joseph Stalin sent for H. Karpov, a very "private" National Security colonel.³ The conversation took place in the presence of Beria and Malenkov. As secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), the latter was responsible for ideology. The conversation centred on the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Stalin was interested in such things as: what is Metropolitan Sergei like; his age, physical condition, his authority in the Church, his position toward government authority; a short character sketch of Metropolitans Aleksei (Symanskii) and Nikolai (Yarushevich); when and what Metropolitan Tikhon had been in the Patriarchate; what connections the ROC maintains abroad; who is the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, etc.; what did Karpov know about the leadership of the Orthodox Churches of Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Romania; in what material circumstances did Metropolitans Sergei, Aleksei, and Nikolai live; the total number of ROC parishes; and the overall number of its bishops.

Karpov, who headed the section of the National Council for State Security, USSR, [the NKGB, or, in Ukrainian NKDB] which dealt with questions of religion in the country, provided exhaustive answers. Stalin was satisfied with the information; now he was interested to know if Karpov was Russian, how long he had served in the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), his education, and the source of his familiarity with church matters. Karpov had

³ At that time, officials of the National Security had special ranks (similar to its Nazi German counterpart – Hitler's SS), which were three ranks higher than the military nomenclature.