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Author(s): Johannes Due Enstad

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Prayers and Patriotism in Nazi-Occupied Russia: The Pskov Orthodox Mission and Religious Revival, 1941–1944

JOHANNES DUE ENSTAD

ON 18 August 1941, fourteen Russian Orthodox priests, accompanied by two German officers, travelled from Riga, by that time under civilian Nazi rule in the Reichskommissariat Ostland, to the Russian city of Pskov, then under administration by the German Wehrmacht. The priests formed the nucleus of the so-called Orthodox Mission in the Liberated Regions of Russia (better known as the Pskov Orthodox Mission), a network of clergymen consisting by mid 1943 of about 500 priests and other staff.¹ With travel permits issued by German commanders, the missionaries traversed the districts between Pskov in the south, the outskirts of besieged Leningrad in the north, and the front line to the east, tending to the spiritual and material needs of a mostly peasant population. The priests soon learned that popular religiosity was alive and well despite Bolshevik efforts to replace traditional religion with Communism. Years later, one priest would describe what took place as ‘the second christening of Rus’.²

While important studies of the church in occupied Ukraine and Belarus do exist,³ less has been said about the nature and implications of religious

Johannes Due Enstad is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo.

¹ Konstantin Oboznyi, ‘Pravoslavnoe dukhovenstvo na Pskovskoi zemle v gody nemetskoj okkupatsii (1941–1944 gg.)’, in A. V. Gogolevskii (ed.), *Pskov v voennoi istorii XX veka*, vyp. 1, Pskov, 2009, pp. 241–62 (pp. 243–44); V. P. Volkova and E. M. Fedorova (eds), *Voinoi ispepelennye goda: Pskovskii krai nakanune i v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny. Sbornik dokumentov Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva Pskovskoi oblasti*, Pskov, 2005, p. 448 (n.6).

² R. V. Polchaninov, ‘Pskovskaia pravoslavnaia missiia 1941–2001 gg. K 60-letiiu osnovaniia’, *Pravoslavnaia zhizn (Orthodox Life)*, 51, 2001, 1, p. 3.

³ Karel C. Berkhoff, ‘Was There a Religious Revival in Soviet Ukraine under the Nazi

revival in Russia proper under Nazi rule. About the Pskov Orthodox Mission itself, very little has been written in English.⁴ Based on German military records, post-war memoirs written by former members of the Mission, and recent works by Russian historians, this article helps fill a gap in the social history of the wartime Soviet Union by exploring the history of the Mission and its relationship with people and power in German-occupied northwest Russia. The article finds that, in marked contrast to the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, where the Nazi administration obstructed church life and where priests were terrorized into collaborating, the German military administration in northwest Russia largely allowed the religious revival to unfold. While the clergy served the German regime's interests in several respects, they were not simply collaborators or tools of German power. They managed to carve out space for action at the local level, often acting independently of the German authorities. In so doing, they were pursuing an agenda marked by an anti-Soviet kind of Russian patriotism. For the German authorities, religious revival turned out to be a double-edged sword: while the priests' appeals to the faithful helped shore up support for the occupation regime, their patriotic message also kindled a popular sense of Russian national identity which could be turned against the Germans, especially over time as an increasing part of the population came to see Nazi Germany as an even greater evil than Stalin and the Bolsheviks.

Origins of the Pskov Orthodox Mission

The Pskov Orthodox Mission saw the light of day thanks to the efforts of Metropolitan Sergii (Voskresenskii), who by the time the Germans invaded was serving in Riga as the regional head (Exarch) of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Baltic States. Amidst the chaos of German bombing and the Red Army retreating in late June 1941, Sergii went into hiding in the basement of the cathedral in Riga. A servant of the Moscow

Regime?', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 78, 2000, 3, pp. 536–67; Leonid Rein, 'The Orthodox Church in Byelorussia under Nazi Occupation (1941–1944)', *East European Quarterly*, 39, 2005, 1, pp. 13–46.

⁴ The only accounts in English to (briefly) treat the history of the Mission were written in the 1970s. See W. Alexeev and T. G. Stavrou, *The Great Revival: The Russian Orthodox Church under German Occupation*, Minneapolis, MN, 1976; Harvey Fireside, *Icon and Swastika: The Russian Orthodox Church under Nazi and Soviet Control*, Cambridge, MA, 1971. Two more recent works by Russian historians are more thorough: Konstantin Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii 1941–1944 gg.*, Moscow, 2008; M. V. Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika: Natsistskaia Germaniia i Pravoslavnaia Tserkov'*, Moscow, 2007.

Patriarchate for fifteen years, Sergii had been sent to Latvia following the Soviet occupation in 1940. Rising to the rank of archbishop, eventually becoming the right hand of Sergii (Stragorodskii) (*de facto* head of the Russian Orthodox Church in the period 1925–43, then Patriarch from 1943 until his death in 1944), he was an ambitious and able priest with a successful career. Sergii (Voskresenskii) managed, along with only three other patriarchal bishops, to sidestep and survive the anti-religious assaults of the Stalinist government in the 1930s.⁵ Sheer luck was probably involved, but Sergii also seems to have possessed a prodigious ability to navigate difficult and dangerous political surroundings. One German official, having investigated Sergii's background, concluded that he was 'a very wise man' who had outwitted the Bolsheviks by 'playing a highly sophisticated game'.⁶

Sergii's relationship with the German occupation authorities began when he was arrested by German police on 1 July 1941, only to be released four days later. It appears that Sergii managed to persuade his German captors that they would be politically better off by cooperating with him in his capacity as canonical Exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate than they would be by eliminating the Exarchate and reviving the Latvian and Estonian Orthodox churches under the Patriarchate of Constantinople (whose head, at the time, was an ally of London).⁷ Sergii argued, not implausibly, that the Russian Orthodox Church under Moscow had never truly come to terms with the atheist Bolshevik regime, which had caused the church enormous suffering and loss. His message to the Germans was that, in his capacity as official representative of the Russian Orthodox Church in liberated territory, he had a moral imperative to call upon Russian believers to rise against the Communists.⁸ Sergii's message resonated with local German commanders. In early July, he contacted the Army Group North command to suggest sending a group of Orthodox missionaries into the occupied districts of northwest Russia.⁹ By the middle of August, he had received

⁵ Steven M. Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941–1945*, Chapel Hill, NC, 2003, p. 48.

⁶ Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938–1942*, Stuttgart, 1981, pp. 74–75.

⁷ Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, p. 322; Alexeev and Stavrou, *The Great Revival*, p. 83. The Latvian and Estonian Orthodox churches were under Constantinople's jurisdiction until the Soviet occupation in 1940, at which time they were pressured by the Bolsheviks to pledge their allegiance to the Moscow Patriarchate.

⁸ Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, p. 323.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 326; Jörn Hasenclever, *Wehrmacht und Besatzungspolitik in der Sowjetunion*.

the go-ahead, and fourteen priests were dispatched to Pskov on 18 August 1941, marking the birth of the Pskov Orthodox Mission. The Mission, along with the Baltic Exarchate and its head Sergii (Voskresenskii), remained in canonical subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate during the war years.¹⁰

The Mission could not have come into being without approval from the new German authorities. While the Nazi leadership did not envision upholding any significant cultural institution that embodied Russian and Slavic identity in the long run, Hitler recognized the need to temporarily come to terms with the Orthodox Church and make propagandistic use of it during the war against the Soviet Union. Thus, official Wehrmacht instructions on religious policy in the occupied Soviet territories stated that the national consciousness of non-Bolshevik Russians was ‘tied to deep religious sentiment’. The directives predicted that ‘joy and gratitude for the liberation from Bolshevism will often be expressed in churchly form’, and instructed Wehrmacht personnel not to disturb religious services and processions.¹¹ This hands-off stance was officially confirmed in a decree issued by Hitler in late July 1941, and again in October.¹²

The German occupation administration in the Army Group North rear area was headed by General Franz von Roques, who took a liberal stance in church matters. Von Roques was himself an avowed Christian, and the religious enthusiasm he observed in the occupied Russian territories seems to have impressed him at an early stage. By August 1941, a few weeks into the occupation, German authorities were opening churches and handing out crucifixes to the population, according to NKVD reports.¹³ In the settlement of Taitsy, German soldiers even helped restore a local church, painting walls and making crosses.¹⁴ Von Roques’s approach to the Russian church was deemed too activist by the Army High Command, which ended up launching an investigation into the matter. Von Roques lamented

Die Befehlshaber der rückwärtigen Heeresgebiete 1941–1943, Paderborn, 2010, p. 274.

¹⁰ Despite German orders to the contrary, Sergii (Voskresenskii) as well as many rank-and-file priests with the Mission evidently continued to mention (and thus formally recognize) the Patriarch in their sermons for the duration of the occupation. See Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, pp. 518–20.

¹¹ Norbert Müller, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in der UdSSR 1941–1944. Dokumente*, Cologne, 1980, p. 53.

¹² Hasenclever, *Wehrmacht und Besatzungspolitik*, p. 274.

¹³ D. Iu. Khokhlov, ‘Istoriia okkupatsii v arkhivnykh dokumentakh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti. Leto 1941 — zima 1941/42 g.’, *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 2006, 7, pp. 58–61.

¹⁴ Mikhail Shkarovskii, ‘Tserkov’ zovet k zashchite rodiny’, *Biblioteka Iakova Krotova*, 27 March 2006 <<http://krotov.info/history/20/1940/1941shka.htm>> [accessed 11 June 2015] / <<http://www.webcitation.org/6hTxHboVV>> [accessed 13 May 2016].

after the war that his superiors had frustrated his ambitions in the field of church policy and thus relinquished an effective means to influence the population. Several military commanders came to share von Roques's view during the occupation, advocating a more active exploitation of the high popular esteem enjoyed by the clergy and their antagonistic relationship to the Bolsheviks.¹⁵ In contrast to the case of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, where civilian Nazi authorities 'obstructed church life more and more',¹⁶ the military administration in northwest Russia did not impede religious revival. On the contrary, its tolerant stance was precisely what enabled the introduction and operation of such an organized effort as the Pskov Orthodox Mission.

While it is clear that the Mission could not have been organized openly without German permission, there is little reason to believe that it was set up by German authorities as a propaganda structure, as some Russian historians have argued.¹⁷ On the contrary, local grassroots initiatives were an important and possibly decisive driver. Even before the Mission had been established, local inhabitants were putting their churches back into operation. From Pskov in the south to the outskirts of Leningrad in the north, local priests had begun to administer religious services on their own account, before the arrival of the Mission.¹⁸ Metropolitan Sergii's decision to establish the Mission appears to have been influenced by requests sent to him from people in Pskov and elsewhere in the occupied Russian territories.¹⁹ As one of the Mission's former psalm-singers recalled:

I think the idea to send Orthodox missionaries into the parishes of northwest Russia was given to him by the Russian people itself. You know, after the Red Army retreated hundreds of thousands of people were left to their fate. The people poured into those churches that were still standing.

¹⁵ Hasenclever, *Wehrmacht und Besatzungspolitik*, pp. 272–77; Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, p. 131; Freiburg, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (hereafter, BA-MA), RH 26-281/33, 281. Sicherungs-Division, VII, 'Lagebericht der Abt. VII für die Zeit vom 16.6 bis 15.7.1943', 24 July 1943; BA-MA, RH 24-10/389, p. 274, Armee-Oberkommando 16, Ic/A.O.-Abt. Presse, 'Betr.: Propaganda in die russ. Zivilbevölkerung', 30 April 1943.

¹⁶ Berkhoff, 'Was There a Religious Revival'.

¹⁷ Boris Kovalev, for instance, calls the Mission 'a propaganda structure', the activities of which were 'subjected to the counterintelligence interests of the German security services'. Boris Kovalev, *Povsednevaia zhizn' naseleniia Rossii v period natsistskoi okkupatsii*, Moscow, 2011, p. 476.

¹⁸ Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, p. 356; Shkarovskii, 'Tserkov' zovet'.

¹⁹ Aleksii Ionov, 'Zapiski missionera', *Pravoslavie i mir*, 8 May 2012 <<http://www.pravmir.ru/zapiski-missionera/>> [accessed 11 June 2015] / <<http://www.webcitation.org/6hTxVOFXw>> [accessed 13 May 2016]; Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, p. 69.

Never before were so many tears shed and deep sighs heard inside them. People sent petitioners on foot to Pskov asking that priests be sent out.²⁰

The make-up of the Pskov Orthodox Mission also testifies to the local roots of the organization. While the leadership largely consisted of Russian émigrés to the Baltic countries, many of whom had been educated as priests in pre-Revolutionary Russia, a majority of the Mission's clergy were local inhabitants of northwest Russia, many of them priests who had survived the anti-religious terror of the 1930s. Some had spent years in forced labour camps; others had been evicted from their homes as 'kulaks', living on the margins of existence on the outskirts of villages and towns. Another part of the clergy consisted of local parishioners who were ordained during the occupation. The Mission's rank-and-file was diverse in both social origin and age, consisting of peasants, workers and intellectuals ranging from their late twenties to their late seventies.²¹

Rebuilding a churchly wasteland

As the missionaries entered the northwest Russian territories in August 1941, they found that church life had all but ceased to exist. While this region had been home to more than one thousand working churches in 1936, by 1941 no more than a handful remained. As one of the priests, Aleksii Ionov, recalled in his memoirs, 'the Soviet government had transformed the enormous area [...] into a churchly wasteland. The beautiful churches had been destroyed, desecrated, and turned into storehouses, workshops, dancing clubs, movie theaters, and archives. The repressed clergy had for the most part died in Siberian concentration camps'.²² Soon after arriving in Pskov, most of the missionaries departed again in order to carry out their work and organize church life in the districts of northwest Russia. They were issued special permits by the German authorities allowing them to travel freely and exempting them from labour duties.²³ One year later, the priests had established a wide-reaching network of churchly activity, with some 220 churches put into operation.²⁴

²⁰ Valerii Nikonov, 'Bylo mnogo boli, i nado byt' ee preodolet', *Morskaja gazeta*, 17 August 2002 <http://feodorovna.ucoz.lv/index/pskovskaja_missija_morskaja_gazeta/o-150> [accessed 11 June 2015] / <<http://www.webcitation.org/6hTxg7QPU>> [accessed 13 May 2016].

²¹ Oboznyi, 'Pravoslavnoe dukhovenstvo', pp. 246–47.

²² Ionov, 'Zapiski missionera'.

²³ Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, p. 415.

²⁴ See Konstantin Oboznyi, 'Pskovskaia pravoslavnaia missiia v 1941–1944 gg.', *Zhurnal 'Pravoslavnaia obshchina'*, 2000, 54/55 <<http://krotov.info/history/20/1940/1941oboz.html>> [accessed 11 June 2015] / <<http://www.webcitation.org/6hTxdvLn>> [accessed 13 May 2016].

The activities of the Pskov Orthodox Mission were manifold. Its primary concerns were spiritual, but in order to set in motion a spiritual revival it was necessary to establish a material and economic infrastructure. The priests set out to organize the restoration, consecration and opening of churches and shrines (with help from, and sometimes on the initiative of, local inhabitants). For financial support, the Mission maintained a business department that administered a candle works, a church paraphernalia store and an icon-painting workshop. The demand for candles, icons, crucifixes, prayer books and the like was large throughout the region. By October 1942, the Mission's icon painters had refurbished the iconostases in seven churches and built a number of new ones as well. The Mission also provided parishes with wine and flour for communion, lamp oil and building materials. The resulting income covered the salaries of the Mission's administrative employees. The clergy, for its part, received no official salary but kept part of the voluntary contributions offered by parishioners. Ten per cent of the latter — estimated in late 1942 at 100,000 rubles monthly — went to the Mission administration; the remainder was used to pay local churchwardens, cantors, choristers, cleaners and janitors. By the end of 1943, the Mission was working with a surplus, which it used to educate new priests.²⁵

The missionaries worked hard to reopen schools and introduce religious education across northwest Russia. Initially and throughout the first year of the occupation, German authorities adopted a pragmatic stance, seeing no good reason not to allow the teaching of religion in schools, which was obviously welcomed by a large part of the population. In the Pushkinskie Gory district, one priest obtained the local German commandant's permission to organize the opening of seventeen schools beginning in November 1941, while another missionary in the Oepochka district was credited with the opening of fifteen elementary schools in May 1942. Reportedly, 'a full Scripture course with prayers' was being taught there 'at the request of the people'. The priest Aleksii Ionov recounted in his memoirs that, while attending a teachers' conference in autumn 1942, he managed to persuade both the teachers and the local German commander that Scripture had to be taught in schools. His argument

²⁵ Berlin-Lichterfelde, Bundesarchiv (hereafter, BArch), R 58/222, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD/Kommandostab, 'Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten Nr. 28', 6 November 1942; BA-MA, RH 23/281, p. 94, Sicherheitspolizei und SD/Einsatzkommando 3/IV B 1, 'Betr.: Griech.orthod.Mission in Pleskau', 4 December 1943; Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, p. 359; Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, pp. 180–83; Alexeev and Stavrou, *The Great Revival*, p. 104.

was, first, that the Russian people had always been — and still remained — religious and second, that the local tax-paying peasantry was entitled to see their children religiously educated. Subsequently, Ionov recalled, ‘Icons gradually appeared in all schools, prayers were said before and after lessons, and Scripture was taught twice a week’.²⁶

By August 1942, a ban on religious education had been introduced, but it did not last long. Responding to vigorous protests lodged by the Mission, the German authorities, already harbouring doubts about the decision, soon backtracked and retracted the ban.²⁷ Unlike in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, where the teaching of religion was generally banned by mid 1942,²⁸ religious education was instituted in many if not most schools across northwest Russia throughout the occupation, not least owing to the persistent efforts of the missionaries and the local priests.

Just as persistently, the priests were engaged in charity from the start. Again, this sets northwest Russia apart from the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, where church charity was not allowed.²⁹ The efforts were directed at poor people, refugees from the frontline areas and homeless children. In Pskov, the Mission established a small orphanage in autumn 1942, collecting furniture and other necessities from among the parishioners, who also contributed to securing the food supply. The German economic commander (head of the *Wirtschaftskommando*) in Pskov — ‘a great Russophile’ in the eyes of one former missionary — aided the orphanage by allocating food.³⁰ While the taking in of homeless children was certainly seen as an end in itself and a religious duty, the missionaries also saw an opportunity to foster and educate youngsters in the spirit of the faith. The orphanage primarily accommodated children in their early teens, ‘so that they can be prepared for religious-educational work among children and youth already within the next few years’.³¹ The priests were looking ahead

²⁶ Ionov, ‘Zapiski missionera’. The Germans also reported that the Mission intended to ‘gradually install icons in all school premises’. BArch, R 58/222, p. 12, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Kommandostab, ‘Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten Nr. 28’, 6 November 1942.

²⁷ BA-MA, RH 22/288, p. 90bs, Der Kommandierende General der Sicherungstruppen u. Befehlshaber im Heeresgebiet Nord, Ia/VII, ‘Monatsbericht’, 15 August 1942; BArch, R 58/222, p. 12, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, ‘Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten Nr. 28’, 6 November 1942.

²⁸ Berkhoff, ‘Was there a Religious Revival’, p. 551.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 540.

³⁰ R. V. Polchaninov, ‘Pskovskoe sodruzhestvo molodezhi pri pravoslavnoi missii’, *Pravoslavnaia zhizn’ (Orthodox Life)*, 51, 2001, 1, p. 24.

³¹ Pskov, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Pskovskoi oblasti (hereafter, GAPO), R-1633/1/3, G. Benigsen to K. Zaits, 2 October 1942.

and envisioning a new post-war order in which the Orthodox Church would again flourish.

Charity efforts had an important grassroots dimension. Having conducted an audit into church accounts in Luga in March 1942, the German authorities noted that the population there was 'prepared to make significant offerings despite the current state of distress', which brought in 1,000 to 1,500 rubles at every service.³² Informal Red Cross organizations and similar public aid institutions were established by priests and local inhabitants in many places throughout northwest Russia. Wherever churchly life was re-established, the priests and parishioners actively participated in relief efforts by offering money, clothes, food and other necessities.³³

German military authorities at the local level recognized in the priests a source of public welfare. In December 1941, a German commandant in Vyritsa urged a priest to collect warm clothes among his parishioners for poverty-stricken refugees. Soon, about one hundred items had been gathered.³⁴ This was no isolated case: according to Oleg Anisimov, the wartime head of a Riga-based welfare committee concerned with Soviet refugees and a perceptive observer of the conditions in the occupied territories, the German military authorities 'as a rule' cooperated with the priests in their relief efforts.³⁵

Soviet prisoners of war were an important target of the Mission's charity efforts. As early as 19 August 1941, the day after their arrival in Pskov, the missionaries urged the head of the Pskov-Pechersk monastery to send help to the starving POWs, which resulted in four carts arriving in Pskov carrying flour, bread, eggs and other goods donated by the parishioners.³⁶ In the town of Ostrov, the priest Aleksii Ionov organized a 'Russian Red Cross' whose main efforts were directed at a local POW camp holding some two hundred people. As Ionov recalled in his post-war memoirs, the organization, tolerated by local German authorities, was able to provide the prisoners with 'a humane meal twice a week', which apparently helped

³² BA-MA, RH 22/259, p. 243, Befehlshaber d. rückw. Heeres-Geb. Nord, VII, 'Lagebericht', 15 March 1942.

³³ Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, pp. 303–28; A. K. Galkin and A. A. Bovkalo, 'Tserkovnaia zhizn' Gdova v dni okkupatsii (1941–1943 gg.)', *Zemlia Gdovskaia: sait gdovskogo muzeia istorii kraia*, n.d. <<https://archive.is/kHeZg>> [accessed 10 June 2015] / <<http://www.webcitation.org/6hTz1OzkZ>> [accessed 13 May 2016].

³⁴ See Shkarovskii, 'Tserkov' zovet'.

³⁵ Oleg Anisimov, *The German Occupation in Northern Russia during World War II: Political and Administrative Aspects*, New York, 1954, p. 25.

³⁶ Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, p. 362.

reduce the camp's death rate.³⁷ In other cases, particularly when the German SD (security service) was involved, charity efforts directed at POWs were blocked. When SD officers learned that Sergii Efimov, one of the Mission's leaders, was urging locals to collect food for starving prisoners, he was relieved from his post and sent back to Latvia.³⁸ Aware of this hostility, the Mission's leadership in a summary of their activities presented to the SD in September 1942 mentioned charity directed at orphans, poor people and refugees, but remained silent about POWs.³⁹ Below the German radar, the priests continued to display a stubborn resilience in their efforts to help Soviet prisoners of war.⁴⁰

One should not overestimate the impact of the Mission's welfare activities. In late 1943, a German intelligence report found them 'insignificant, lacking the ability to offer any greater amount of aid'.⁴¹ In Pskov, the Mission reportedly had an income from charity of 10,000 to 12,000 rubles per month; in other places, the figures were somewhat lower.⁴² While these sums were helpful, 10,000 rubles still only allowed for meager payments of, for example, 100 rubles per month for 100 people, while tens of thousands were needy. Though limited in its scope and overall effect, the priests' charity work nevertheless imbued the Pskov Orthodox Mission with a significant material dimension that made a real difference for many of the poorest and most exposed inhabitants of northwest Russia.

A political mission?

Operating under permission from the German authorities, the Pskov Orthodox Mission had to navigate in a landscape of German as well as Soviet interests and demands. At the front, the war was raging between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. In the occupied territories, a smaller war was being fought between Soviet partisans and German security forces.

³⁷ Ionov, 'Zapiski missionera'.

³⁸ Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, pp. 314–15.

³⁹ BArch R 58/225, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Kommandostab, 'Mitteilungsblatt Nr. 10', 21 September 1942.

⁴⁰ On the continuing charity efforts directed at POWs, see Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, pp. 316–18; Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, p. 368.

⁴¹ BA-MA, RH 23/281, Sicherheitspolizei und SD/Einsatzkommando 3/IV B 1, 'Betr.: Griech.orthod.Mission in Pleskau', 4 December 1943.

⁴² BArch, R 58/222, p. 13, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Kommandostab, 'Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten Nr. 28', 6 November 1942. In Luga, the monthly donations to the church totalled 6,000 rubles in August 1942 and rose to 9,000 by November. Cf. BA-MA, RH 26-285/42, p. 88, Sicherungs-Division 285, Abt. VII, 'Betr.: Lagebericht', 2 August 1942; BArch, R 58/222, p. 13, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Kommandostab, 'Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten Nr. 28', 6 November 1942.

A psychological war was also being fought for the hearts and minds of the local population. While the pursuit of religious duty was at the core of their project, the priests inevitably also became entangled with politics and power.

The role of the Pskov Orthodox Mission as a political actor remains a heated issue among Russian historians today. Two main interpretations have emerged. While some historians accuse the Mission of submitting entirely to the occupation regime, becoming a political tool in the hands of the German security services, others see the priests as being engaged in a strictly religious endeavour, sidestepping German demands and thus avoiding complicity with Nazi crimes.⁴³ Each position captures important elements of the Mission's role, but both tend to make too sweeping claims and end up painting a reductive, black-and-white picture of the Mission.

In post-war memoirs, former members of the Mission defended their reputations against allegations of treason. Consider the words of the priest Georgii Benigsen, published in 1946 after he had fled the advancing Red Army and ended up in Germany:

Our life and work under German occupation was an uninterrupted battle against the Germans for the Russian soul, for our right to serve this soul, to serve our own people who escaped one yoke only to fall under another. Today, some people wish to present our struggle as cooperation with the Fascists. God is the judge of those who want to stain our sacred and bright cause, for which some of our men, including priests and bishops, died from the bullets of Bolshevik agents; others were arrested and killed by Hitler's Gestapo.⁴⁴

Attempts by German authorities to exploit the priests for their close relationship to the local population in order to 'carry out their criminal measures', Benigsen claims, were 'rigidly repulsed' by the clergy.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, the missionary Aleksii Ionov, in his memoirs published in the United States in 1954–55, denied any political collaboration with the Germans, stating that 'the Mission received no instructions of any specific nature from the German authorities'.⁴⁶ While the Mission certainly cannot be reduced to

⁴³ For example, Kovalev, *Povsednevnaia zhizn'*, p. 476; Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, pp. 412–52, esp. pp. 440–42 and p. 451; Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, pp. 376–77.

⁴⁴ Georgii Benigsen, 'Khristos Pobeditel', *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, 168, 1993, p. 134.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴⁶ Ionov, 'Zapiski missionera'.

simply a tool in the hands of the Germans, the priests did act in ways that substantially furthered the interests of the occupation power.

The Germans encountered in the clergy, who generally considered the Bolshevik regime hostile and even Satanic, a natural ally. Thus, by late August 1941, German intelligence officers found the priests to be ‘everywhere praying in the churches for the victory of the German army and even of their own accord encouraging the population to fight the partisans together with the Germans’.⁴⁷ In September 1941, a priest in the village of Gortsy near Lake Ilmen delivered a sermon likening the coming of the Germans to the story of the Good Samaritan: ‘And so, like in the Gospel, the strangers — not our own — came to help us, and they helped us get to our feet. They have even promised to help us in the future!’⁴⁸ Another sermon, delivered in Krasnogwardeisk in March 1942, went further, hailing Hitler as a benevolent master who had ‘stretched out his fatherly hand’ to the Russians and ‘destroyed the Satanic power’ of Bolshevism.⁴⁹ Having registered the prevalence of such sentiments among the clergy, some German officers reckoned that the priests should be ‘won over’ and ‘shaped into propaganda activists’, given their influence upon the local population.⁵⁰ Indeed, though the priests in the Mission were not simply converted into agents of German power, several examples suggest that, in important respects, the Mission did come to function as a vehicle for German propaganda.

For example, the priests took an active part in promoting the ‘New Agrarian Order’ decreed by the German authorities in spring 1942, a land reform entailing de-collectivization. On that occasion, the Mission issued a public announcement restating the principles of the decree and encouraging peasants to receive this ‘message of peace’ from the German government ‘with deep and profound gratitude’. Now that the ‘twenty-five-year long night’ of Bolshevik rule (also likened to a ‘Satanic curse’) was coming to an end, the announcement said, it was everyone’s duty to ‘fight as bravely as the German frontline soldiers do’ in order to achieve the

⁴⁷ Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, IV A 1, ‘Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 69’, 31 August 1941, printed in Klaus-Michael Mallmann et al. (eds), *Die Ereignismeldungen UdSSR 1941. Dokumente der Einsatzgruppen in der Sowjetunion*, Darmstadt, 2011, p. 384.

⁴⁸ Berlin, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (hereafter, PA AA), R 60721, translation of a sermon given by a Novgorod priest in Gortsy, 28 September 1941.

⁴⁹ BA-MA, RH 20-18/1448, p. 264, ‘Die Übersetzung der Rede des Priesters der griech. orth. Kirche anlässlich der Grosskundgebung zur Bekanntgabe der neuen Agrarordnung in Krasnogwardeisk am 15. März 1942’.

⁵⁰ BA-MA, RW 31/948, Wi.Kdo. Görlitz, Bef.St.Krasnogwardeisk, ‘Lagebericht (Monat Dezember 1941)’, 30 December 1941; BA-MA, RH 20-18/1448, pp. 241–42, Wirtschaftskommando Krasnogwardeisk, ‘Monatsbericht für März 1942’, undated.

'rebuilding and rebirth of our homeland'.⁵¹ For the official launching of the New Agrarian Order on 15 March 1942, priests cooperated closely with local German authorities, including propaganda companies. Having carried out festive announcements in the towns of Krasnogvardeisk, Kingisepp, Krasnoe Selo, Liuban', Siverskaia and Volosovo, the German agency responsible noted that the events had been well attended and attributed this partly to 'the emphasis on the connection with the Church'.⁵² Other German observers also noted that the priests consistently and successfully used their influence with the local population to further the aims of the New Agrarian Order.⁵³

In the spring of 1942, the SD office in Pskov passed down instructions to the Mission requesting priests to 'take enthusiastic part' in the coming anniversary celebrations of the German takeover of towns and villages, to organize religious processions, and to hold thanksgiving prayers expressing gratitude to the German army for the 'liberation'. This was duly done.⁵⁴ For instance, in Podgoshchi near Shimsk during the Easter of 1942, the clergy arranged a large religious feast, including thanksgiving services, in honour of the liberation from the Bolsheviks.⁵⁵

Were the priests cooperating willingly? One of the former missionaries, Georgii Tailov, later described the Germans as relating to the priests 'in a polite but demanding way'.⁵⁶ It appears that these demands were hardly ever openly resisted by the clergy. Very few priests gave the Germans any reason to apply violence; reports of punitive measures taken against priests are few and far between.⁵⁷ This, of course, does not mean that the priests did not think about the potential consequences of stepping out of line — they most likely did. In any case, whether out of fear or conviction or a mixture of both, the majority continued to preach in a pro-German fashion. The German intelligence apparatus kept watch over

⁵¹ BA-MA, RW 31/919, 'Aufruf der Leitung der Orthodoxen Mission an die Bevölkerung der befreiten Gebiete', undated (no earlier than March 1942).

⁵² BA-MA, RH 20-18/1448, p. 261, Wi.Kdo Krasnogvardeisk, 'Monatsbericht für März 1942', undated (no earlier than 15 March 1942).

⁵³ PA AA, R 60769, V.A.A. beim AOK 18, 'Die Einführung der neuen Agrarordnung im besetzten nordwestrussischen Gebiet', 30 March 1942.

⁵⁴ The priests took an active part in the anniversaries of the 'liberation' in both 1942 and 1943. See Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, pp. 428–32.

⁵⁵ PA AA, R 60724, p. 1, V.A.A. beim AOK 16, 'Betr.: Lage im Armeebereich', 2 July 1942.

⁵⁶ Georgii Tailov, 'Vospominaniia o Georgiia Tailova o ego rabote v Pskovskoi pravoslavnoi missii 1941–44 gg.', *Pravoslavnaia zhizn (Orthodox Life)*, 51, 2001, 1, p. 10.

⁵⁷ This observation contrasts with the case of Ukraine, where Karel Berkhoff has argued that the priests were terrorized into collaborating — spying on the parishioners and praying for Hitler in their sermons. See Berkhoff, 'Was there a Religious Revival?'

what happened in the churches via random inspections carried out by translators in civilian clothing or via a network of informants and agents that was recruited from among churchwardens and choristers. It would have come to German attention if the church was turning anti-German. Yet numerous intelligence reports from various German agencies instead testify to the contrary.⁵⁸ Thus, by spring 1943, an impressed German propaganda officer in the 16th Army could conclude, 'The Russian clergy represent the best and most dependable propagandists for the German cause'.⁵⁹

Despite the general political dependability of the clergy in the eyes of German authorities, there were limits to the priests' readiness to serve German interests, and their relationship to the partisans illustrates these limits. If the missionaries were willing to hold pro-German sermons and encourage popular support for German measures such as the New Agrarian Order, they were generally reluctant or unwilling to denounce the partisans and their supporters. Relatively few seem to have contributed actively to the German anti-partisan campaign. German authorities noted in February 1942 that 'individual Russian priests' were 'occasionally' providing information about 'partisans and accomplices of partisans'.⁶⁰ As the wording suggests, it was not a widespread occurrence.

The German security services clearly wanted a more eagerly anti-partisan clergy, and in early 1942 they instructed the Mission leadership to distribute circulars to local priests instructing them to collect and transmit information about 'unreliable persons' harbouring anti-German attitudes, as well as about partisans and their helpers and sympathizers.⁶¹ The results, however, were ambiguous and of limited value to German anti-partisan warfare. Many such reports reached German authorities only

⁵⁸ BA-MA, RH 26-281/25a, Sich.Div. 281, Abt. VII, 'Betr.: Verwaltungsbericht', 7 December 1941; BA-MA, RH 26-227/98, p. 4, 227. Infanterie-Division, Ic, 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Abt. Ic für den Monat April 1942', 1 May 1942; BArch, R 58/221, p. 10, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, IV A 1, 'Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 190', 8 April 1942; BA-MA, RH 26-207/29, Gruppe Geheime Feldpolizei 722, 'Anlage 1 zum Tätigkeitsbericht für Monat März 1943/Bericht über Lage und Stimmung in den besetzten Gebieten', 25 March 1943; BA-MA, RH 26-285/43, p. 75, Sicherungs-Division 285, Abt. VII, 'Betr.: Lagebericht', 25 October 1943; BArch, R 6/75, p. 98, Der Vertreter des Reichsministeriums für die besetzten Ostgebiete beim Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Nord, 'Betr.: Haltung und Lage der russischen Bevölkerung im Bereiche der Heeresgruppe Nord', 14 April 1944.

⁵⁹ BA-MA, RH 24-10/389, p. 274, Armee-Oberkommando 16, Ic/A.O.-Abt. Presse, 'Betr.: Propaganda in die russ. Zivilbevölkerung', 30 April 1943.

⁶⁰ BA-MA, RH 22/259, Befehlshaber d. rückw. Heeres-Geb. Nord, VII, 'Lagebericht', 15 February 1942.

⁶¹ Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, p. 440.

after a delay of several weeks, having travelled, by way of an ineffective postal service, from the districts to the Mission's headquarters in Pskov, and then to Exarch Sergii in Riga, who in turn wrote summaries for the political department of the Reichskommissariat Ostland. Moreover, most reports contained little or no concrete information about the partisans and their whereabouts, instead taking the shape of a general overview of popular mood.⁶²

According to Dmitrii Karov, a Russian-born intelligence officer with the German 18th Army during the war, most priests in the area refused to be recruited as secret agents — with some, as he saw it, 'brilliant and valuable exceptions'. Laymen working in the churches — churchwardens and choristers — more often agreed to serve as agents.⁶³ If the data reported by the Leningrad oblast NKGB chief in February 1945 are reliable, these exceptions to the rule of non-involvement were not without consequences. According to the report, '144 Soviet patriots' engaged in anti-German work had been revealed and handed over to the German SD during the occupation 'as a result of the treacherous activity of the Orthodox Mission and the clergy subordinated to it'.⁶⁴ On the other hand, a number of priests actively assisted partisans with supplies and information, and some of them — the numbers are unclear — were executed by the Germans as a result.⁶⁵

Over time, church-partisan relations became progressively more amicable, which is partly attributable to the changing nature of the partisan movement itself. In the early phase of the war, it was relatively small, its recruits largely coming from the ranks of Communist activists and guerrillas brought in from the Soviet rear. These partisans largely considered the priests in the occupied territories to be 'enemies of the people'. In the Sebez and Idritsa districts in the fall of 1942, partisans burned down churches and shot priests. Elsewhere, priests were forbidden to carry out religious work.⁶⁶ In 1942–43, however, the partisan movement became more popular and locally anchored. Partly as a result of this, it

⁶² Cf Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, pp. 371–72; Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, p. 442.

⁶³ Columbia University, Bakhmeteff Archive, Box 20, D. Karov, 'Nemetskaia kontrrazvedka v okkupirovannykh oblastiakh SSSR v voinu 1941–1945 gg.', undated, pp. 17–18, p. 45.

⁶⁴ Stanislav Bernev, 'Sud 'ba sviatyni', *Rus' pravoslavnaia*, 2001, pp. 11–12.

⁶⁵ Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, pp. 376–77; Igor Ermolov, *Tri goda bez Stalina. Okkupatsiia: sovetskie grazhdane mezhdru natsistami i bol'shevikami 1941–1944*, Moscow, 2010, pp. 275–76.

⁶⁶ BA-MA, RH 26-281/29, 281. Sich.Div, VII, 'Lagebericht für Oktober 1942', 30 October 1942; Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, p. 108.

began to take a more conciliatory approach to the church.⁶⁷ Another reason for the change in the partisans' attitudes was the Soviet government's gradual liberalization of church policy, beginning in 1941 and culminating in September 1943, when Stalin permitted the church to take part in Soviet society again, having Sergii (Stragorodskii) elected Patriarch. By early 1943 at the latest, partisans were no longer attacking the church. According to a March 1943 report by one of the priests, partisans in his district had begun to propagate religious freedom, even issuing apologies 'to God and the Russian people' on behalf of the Soviet government for the anti-religious policies of previous years. 'After this', the priest noted, 'people are less afraid of the partisans and are even beginning to sympathize with them'.⁶⁸ By August 1943, partisans were found to be attending religious services.⁶⁹

Perhaps unexpectedly, the church could also function as a politically neutral meeting place for Russians serving in the German auxiliary police and other Russians who were attached to partisan units. As Dmitrii Karov recalled, in the Idritsa district there was only one church and one priest. Policemen as well as partisans wanted to marry, baptise children and bury their dead in church. In order to avoid armed clashes, the priest appointed certain days for visits by partisans and other days for auxiliary police. However, meetings between the two groups did take place, and what developed was a kind of unofficial truce that often ended in a 'general drinking party'.⁷⁰ The church, in this way, temporarily united people who would otherwise see each other as mortal enemies.

The priests' general reluctance to denounce partisans underscores their ability to act independently of German demands and interests. How did they exercise this independence when confronted with the mass murder of Jews and Roma? German killing units murdered thousands of Jews and about one thousand Roma in northwest Russia.⁷¹ In many of the localities where the Mission established a presence, such as Pskov, Luga and Vyritsa, Jewish communities of up to a thousand people existed when the Germans

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 109–111; Kilian, *Wehrmacht und Besatzungsherrschaft*, pp. 334–35.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, p. 443. See also, Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, pp. 372–73.

⁶⁹ BA-MA, RH 23/301, p. 2, Korück 584, Qu., 'Meldewesen - Monatsbericht', 27 August 1943.

⁷⁰ Columbia University, Bakhmeteff Archive, Box 20, D. Karov, 'Russkaia politsiia v okkupirovannykh nemtsami oblastiakh SSSR v voinu 194–45 gg.' (ch. 9, 'Contacts between the Police and Partisans'), p. 6.

⁷¹ Johannes D. Enstad, 'Soviet Citizens under German Occupation: Life, Death, and Power in Northwest Russia, 1941–1944', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oslo, 2014, pp. 87–96.

arrived. It is highly unlikely that news of the ongoing humiliations and killings should bypass the Mission.

Yet a conspicuous silence with regard to the fate of the victims of German genocidal policies pervades the post-war memoirs of the priests. Only one of the missionaries who left published memoirs mentions the fate of the Jews at all, referring briefly to ‘the terrible shootings of Jews’.⁷² Judging from archival materials and the secondary literature on the Mission, the persecution and murder of thousands of Jews and Roma provoked no official reaction of any kind. The only known exception to this apparent indifference is an example of active complicity: a priest who served in the Kazan church in Vyritsa in 1944–45 was found guilty in a post-war trial of having helped the Germans locate Jews and Communists in hiding.⁷³ Compared to the missionaries’ persistent efforts to aid prisoners of war, orphans, and other particularly weak groups, their silence with regard to the Jews and Roma is striking and supports the conclusion of historian Yitzhak Arad: ‘As far as we know [the Russian Orthodox] church ignored the fate of the Jews and did not come out in their defence.’⁷⁴

Whether caused by acquiescence or indifference, the non-response to the German assault on the Jews suggests that the world-view of the missionaries contained an element of antisemitism. Hostility toward Jews could seep into the missionaries’ world-view both from political anti-Bolshevism (which commonly associated Bolshevism with Jews) and from traditional, religiously based anti-Judaism. Russia, of course, was no stranger to modern antisemitism — the first edition of the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’ was published in Russia in 1903. This most notorious of modern antisemitic works was circulating in the districts of northwest Russia in the interwar period. Significantly in this context, Christian groups were found to be

⁷² See Benigsen, ‘Khristos Pobeditel’’, p. 134. Georgii Tailov did mention Jews twice in his memoirs of the war years, but not in relation to the Holocaust: one concerns an incident in which partisans had plundered his personal belongings, including a silver cross (‘the nuns watched as these young Jewesses “nationalized” all these things’); the other is in regard to the director of the Pushkin Museum in Mikhailovskoe (‘he, a Jew, had run away with the retreating Red Army’). Tailov, ‘Vospominaniia’, pp. 7, 13.

⁷³ The case of this priest was reviewed and turned down for rehabilitation in 2001. See Lidiia Sokolova, ‘Vliianie zapadnichestva na izuchenie istorii Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi missii (1941–1944)’, *Russkaia narodnaia liniia*, 22 March 2011 <http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2011/03/22/vliianie_zapadnichestva_na_izuchenie_istorii_pskovskoj_pravoslavnoj_missii_19411944/> [accessed 11 June 2015] / <<http://www.webcitation.org/6hTzsuwoz>> [accessed 13 May 2016].

⁷⁴ Yitzhak Arad, ‘The Christian Churches and the Persecution of Jews in the Occupied Territories of the U.S.S.R.’, in C. Rittner, S. D. Smith, and I. Steinfeldt (eds), *The Holocaust and the Christian World: Reflections on the Past, Challenges for the Future*, London, 2000, p. 110.

responsible for spreading antisemitic and Nazi propaganda in this region in the late 1930s.⁷⁵

While navigating German demands, interests and policies, the priests were attempting to strengthen their position as bearers of Russian national traditions and identity. In this field, the Mission was independently political, which unnerved German security services, wary that a reinvigorated national pride could fuel popular anti-German resistance. Sensing the suspicious attention of the German authorities, many priests found ways to express attitudes of Russian patriotism concealed in a religious wrapping. As Oleg Anisimov observed:

In the absence of an independent Russian press, the priests were often the only mouthpieces of the national aspirations of the population. The German-controlled press was not allowed to speak of Russia's national greatness, but the priests could mention it and even exalt it, by weaving political themes into religious texts. And many of them did so.⁷⁶

While German authorities took the preaching of Russian patriotism to be a political action with anti-German implications, the priests and the laity did not necessarily make the same connection. Russian patriotism could be reconciled with tolerance of the German presence if the latter were understood as a means to rid Russia of the Bolshevik regime of militant atheism. In this sense, the priests stood for an anti-Soviet kind of Russian patriotism.

A striking example of this attitude appeared in the Mission's official publication, the *Pravoslavnyi Khristianin*. In the September/October 1942 issue, an article entitled 'To the Russian Patriot — the True Son of the Holy Orthodox Church' amounted to a fiery exposition of a religiously based anti-Soviet patriotism that referred to Russian national heroes such as Aleksandr Nevskii. The article began by explaining why the Russian Orthodox people had been suffering under 'the curse of God that has weighed down on Rus' for a quarter of a century'. The answer was, in short, that the Russians had sinned; they had 'committed a terrible crime' by letting Orthodox Russia collapse into ruins and by replacing it with 'a Tower of Babel given the blasphemous and shameful nickname of USSR'.

⁷⁵ Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, New York, 1996, p. 53; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization*, New York, 1994, p. 294.

⁷⁶ Anisimov, *The German Occupation*, p. 24.

Yet this Bolshevik Tower of Babel would not remain standing, the article continued:

Not fortresses, nor weapons, nor tanks, nor airplanes, nor partisans in the rear, nor millions of victims at the front, nor any other kind of support — nothing will keep the Bolshevik tower from falling apart, because it was built on a fundament of lies and deceit, it was reinforced with the cement of violence made with blood and tears.⁷⁷

The article explained that the present suffering was caused by ‘the scourge of God travelling across the Russian lands, painfully beating those who have defiled and abused the heritage of the forefathers’. Through suffering, atonement, repentance and faith, the Russian people would be able to return to the right path, ‘lit up in Russian history by the lives of the holy and great princes Vladimir and Aleksandr Nevskii’, and thus get the chance to ‘realize the ideals of Holy Rus’.⁷⁸ The article avoided speaking about the Germans but appealed strongly to Russian national sentiment. There was nothing overtly pro-German about it, but the German censors let it pass nevertheless, probably because of the religious intensity of its anti-Bolshevik intonation.

The popular response

Former priests typically stressed the depth of popular piety at the time. Their accounts give the impression that people responded to their overtures with gratitude and enthusiasm, actively coming forth to participate in the religious revival. As one priest, who had served as cantor in the town of Gdov during the occupation, evocatively wrote in a letter to the Metropolitan of Leningrad, Aleksii, in early 1944:

In my days as cantor and psalm singer in the city of Gdov I experienced all sorts of popular currents. I can inform you that the Russian completely changed as soon as the Germans appeared. Ruined churches were re-erected, church utensils were crafted, sacred vestments were brought in from wherever they had been preserved, and churches were built and repaired. Everything was painted. Peasants placed clean, embroidered

⁷⁷ ‘Russkomu patriotu — vernomy synu Sv. Pravoslavnoi tserkvi’, *Zhurnal ‘Pravoslavnyi Khristianin’: izdanie Pravoslavnoi Missii v osvobodennykh oblastiakh Rossii*, 1, 1942, 2/3 <http://feodorovna.ucoz.lv/publ/izdaniya_pskovskoj_missii/zhurnal_quot_pravoslavnyj_khristianin_quot/2_3_sentjabr_oktjabr_1942_g_1_j_god_izd/27-1-0-67> [accessed 11 June 2015] / <<http://www.webcitation.org/6hUoB2H2g>> [accessed 13 May 2016].

⁷⁸ Ibid.

towels over the icons. There was much joy and consolation. When everything was ready a priest was invited to consecrate the church. Such joyous events took place during this period that I cannot even describe it. People forgave each other. Children were baptised. There was a real celebration; Russian peasants were celebrating, and I felt that the people here were seeking consolation.⁷⁹

Another priest described the efforts of local inhabitants to clean up, refurbish, and prepare the newly opened churches for services as ‘literally a miracle’. The priests were approached by locals offering donations and various forms of help, including building materials for the churches, liturgical articles, vestments, books and sheet music that had been hidden for years, buried in backyards or concealed in walls.⁸⁰ Local initiatives were numerous: as soon as the priests reached Pskov, they began receiving invitations to hold services in various churches outside the city. As the word spread, people from more distant districts began appearing in Pskov as well, often having made long journeys on foot, to request that priests be dispatched to tend to the faithful in their home villages.⁸¹ ‘When we arrived in Pskov’, one missionary recalled, ‘people were walking by on their way to church with tears in their eyes. During the first mass in the cathedral all the worshippers made their confession. It seemed to us as if the priests had not come to strengthen the people, rather the people were strengthening the priests.’⁸² The missionaries’ arrival coincided with one of the great feasts of the Orthodox Church, the Transfiguration. The large Trinity Cathedral in Pskov, which held several thousand, was filled to capacity, and a steady stream of people approached the priests to receive blessings for themselves and their children, to be anointed with holy oil, and to make confession.⁸³ In Ostrov, the story was similar: after the dilapidated cathedral (which the Bolsheviks had turned into a granary) was repaired and reopened, up to eight hundred people at a time appeared for services, often filling the pews long before the service began.⁸⁴ ‘The people yearned to pray’, one priest recounted. ‘They yearned to repent. There was much

⁷⁹ Letter from cantor S. D. Pleskach to Metropolitan Aleksii on the situation of the Orthodox Church during the period of occupation, 25 January 1944, in M. B. Danilushkin, *Istoriia Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi: ot vosstanovleniia patriarshestva do nashikh dnei. Tom 1: 1917–1970*, St Petersburg, 1997, pp. 877–82 (p. 880).

⁸⁰ Benigsen, ‘Khristos Pobeditel’’, p. 137.

⁸¹ Ionov, ‘Zapiski missionera’.

⁸² Shkarovskii, *Krest i svastika*, p. 357; Alexeev and Stavrou, *The Great Revival*, pp. 100–01.

⁸³ Ionov, ‘Zapiski missionera’; Alexeev and Stavrou, *The Great Revival*, p. 100.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

human pain, and it had to be overcome. The churches were overcrowded: there were tears, prayers, lamentations. That's how mass proceeded. People prayed fervently.'⁸⁵

Post-war accounts by former priests are clearly biased in favour of popular piety and the priests' positive reception. This emphasis was a way for them to fend off charges of collaboration with Nazi Germany. 'We were not collaborators', one reads between the lines of their accounts, 'we were simply following our spiritual calling; we were there for the Russian people who needed us'. Nevertheless, the priests' stories of widespread participation in church life are corroborated by many different sources. In mid-August, German observers found the local population to be attending religious services 'almost without exception'.⁸⁶ People had taken religious icons out of their hiding places and put them up on their walls, and many were even attempting to attend Wehrmacht services, both Roman-Catholic and Protestant.⁸⁷ Religious processions gathered thousands of people.⁸⁸ Parents brought their children to church for baptism in large numbers. The administering of marriages, funerals and other ceremonies was in great demand. In July 1943, German officers found that in the remote village of Kudever, where the clergy had still not established a presence, some 400 children had been baptised and 1,800 confessions made in the course of a three-day visit by a priest from a neighbouring district.⁸⁹ German intelligence reports speak unanimously of a great upsurge of popular religious feeling and participation beginning in August 1941. The reports suggest that religious participation in northwest Russia was widespread and of a popular character throughout the whole period of occupation, right up to the very end.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Kirill Nachis, 'Narod zhazhdal molitsia, zhazhdal pokaianiiia', *Sankt-Peterburgskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti*, 2002, 26 <<http://ricolor.org/history/pv/43/>> [accessed 11 June 2015] / <<http://www.webcitation.org/6hUoRNG2k>> [accessed 13 May 2016]. See also, Serafim Efimov, 'Iz dnevnika missionera', *Pravoslavnyi Khristianin*, 1/2, 1943, 6/7 <<https://archive.is/Yw5e9>> [accessed 11 June 2015].

⁸⁶ Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, IV A 1, 'Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 53', 15 August 1941, printed in Mallmann et al., *Die Ereignismeldungen*, p. 295.

⁸⁷ Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, IV A 1, 'Ereignismeldung UdSSR Nr. 69', 31 August 1941, printed in Mallmann et al., *Die Ereignismeldungen*, pp. 383–84.

⁸⁸ Kilian, *Wehrmacht und Besatzungsherrschaft*, p. 329; Galkin and Bovkalo, 'Tserkovnaia zhizn'.

⁸⁹ BA-MA, RH 26-281/33, 281. Sicherungs-Division, VII, 'Lagebericht der Abt. VII für die Zeit vom 16.6 bis 15.7.1943', 24 July 1943.

⁹⁰ BA-MA, RH 26-285/42, Sicherungs-Division 285, Abt. VII, 'Betr.: Lagebericht', 7 February 1942; BA-MA, RH 22/259, p. 243, Befehlshaber d. rückw. Heeres-Geb. Nord, VII, 'Lagebericht', 15 March 1942; , BA-MA, RH 22/288, p. 52, Der Kommandierende General der Sicherungsgruppen u. Befehlshaber im Heeresgebiet Nord, VII, 'Lagebericht', 15 May

Besides popular piety, much of the religious upsurge stemmed from the harsh and uncertain conditions of everyday life during wartime, which gave rise to a need for spiritual shelter and consolation. The significance of the church as a space for sharing grief and pain can hardly be overstated. As the priest Georgii Benigsen recalled, people were eager to ‘open up their hearts’ and ‘lose their false shame for one another’ during prayers and confessions, because not only had the Bolsheviks claimed victims in almost every family but the war with Germany was also taking its painful toll.⁹¹ On the same note, Aleksii Ionov remembered a mass held in Ostrov in October 1941 during the Intercession feast:

All the people — ‘Soviet’ people — sing in a local and beautiful chant [...]. People kneel and kiss the icons, they come forth to be anointed, and I hear how the singing is interrupted by crying and sobbing. What are the Russian people crying for on this joyous feast? With joy, since the celebration has come at last? Or do they remember the pastors who served in this church long before me and who perished in prison? Or do they recall their close ones arrested and deported to concentration camps in the far north?⁹²

The church, in other words, became an important grieving space in the occupied territories. This phenomenon relates closely to the larger theme of the war as a ‘breathing space’ for Soviet citizens.⁹³ Dmitrii Shostakovich touched upon this in his memoirs, where he wrote that before the war, publicly mourning the victims of Stalinist terror was too dangerous: ‘One had to cry silently. [...] Nobody must notice it. Everybody was afraid of everyone. Grief choked, strangled us.’ The war, however, changed everything: ‘The secret, isolated grief became everyone’s grief. One was allowed to talk about it, one could cry openly, openly mourn for the dead. People needed no longer to be afraid of their tears.’⁹⁴

1942; PA AA, R 60724, p. 1, V.A.A. beim AOK 16, ‘Betr.: Lage im Armeebereich’, 2 July 1942; BA-MA, RH 22/263, p. 139bs, Der Kommandierende General der Sicherungstruppen u. Befehlshaber im Heeresgebiet Nord, Ia/VII, ‘Monatsbericht’, 15 August 1942; BA-MA, RH 26-281/31, 281. Sich.Div., VII, ‘Betr.: Lagebericht für Januar 1943’, 23 January 1943; BA-MA, RH 26-281/33, 281. Sicherungs-Division, VII, ‘Lagebericht der Abt. VII für die Zeit vom 16.6 bis 15.7.1943’, 24 July 1943; BA-MA, RH 26-281/33, 281. Sicherungs-Division, VII, ‘Lagebericht der Abt. VII für die Zeit vom 16.10-15.11.1943’, 26 November 1943; BA-MA, RH 26-285/43, p. 95, Sicherungs-Division 285, Abt. VII, ‘Betr.: Lagebericht’, 2 January 1944.

⁹¹ Benigsen, ‘Khristos Pobeditel’, p. 128.

⁹² Ionov, ‘Zapiski missionera’.

⁹³ Bernd Bonwetsch, ‘War as “Breathing Space”: Soviet Intellectuals and the “Great Patriotic War”’, in Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (eds), *The People’s War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, Urbana and Chicago, IL, 2000, pp. 137–53.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 145–46.

In what way was the popular response to religious revival a *political* response? On 22 June 1941, Sergii (Stragorodskii), acting head of the Moscow Patriarchate, issued a statement denouncing the German invasion, promising that the Church would ‘bless all Orthodox who defend the holy borders of our motherland’.⁹⁵ The statement was probably distributed clandestinely in German-occupied northwest Russia, but its power to move believers on the receiving end must have been limited. After all, Sergii’s statement appeared as a sudden break with two decades of Soviet religious repression. In the words of Steven Merritt Miner: ‘[It] must have astounded the average Russian to read the acting patriarch’s statement that God now favoured Stalin’s cause.’⁹⁶ Moreover, the population in occupied northwest Russia consisted overwhelmingly of peasants with bitter memories of collectivization, anti-religious campaigns, and other repressive Soviet measures of pre-war years. In the minds of Russian peasants, as Sheila Fitzpatrick has noted, the very language of religion had become closely intertwined with anti-Soviet political sentiment.⁹⁷ In this context, the pro-Soviet kind of patriotism conveyed by Sergii’s statement probably had less traction among faithful peasants in northwest Russia than did the anti-Bolshevik message of Sergii (Voskresenskii) and the Pskov Orthodox Mission.

Clearly, religious revival in northwest Russia reinforced popular anti-Bolshevik attitudes and enhanced the legitimacy of the German regime, or at least the German war against the Bolsheviks, in the eyes of many faithful. The following scene demonstrates how church revival could occasion a symbolic elimination of the Bolshevik Revolution: in October 1941, the military commandant in Slutsk, a Leningrad suburb, reported that representatives of the local population had approached the Germans and requested that the town be given back its pre-Revolutionary name of Pavlovsk, which was duly approved. The renaming was announced in connection with a church holiday, which proved a great success. The church was ‘overflowing with people’, and believers reportedly came forward to thank ‘the true Christian Adolf Hitler’ for ‘free[ing] the city from Satan and his helpers’.⁹⁸ In another dramatic manifestation of the anti-Soviet potential of religious revival, faithful in the town of Taitsy

⁹⁵ Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War*, p. 69.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁹⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, p. 214.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Jeff Rutherford, ‘The 121st Infantry Division in North-West Russia, 1941–42’, in Juliette Pattinson and Ben Shepherd (eds), *War in a Twilight World: Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939–45*, Basingstoke, 2010, pp. 69–70.

removed portraits of Lenin and Stalin from a recently reopened church and set fire to them.⁹⁹

As we have seen, the priests injected a message of Russian patriotism into their sermons. According to Anisimov, this served to increase the popular appeal of the church as a symbol of national identity and tradition.¹⁰⁰ The account of one wartime resident of Pskov, published in 1994, demonstrates how close the connection between religious and national identity could be: ‘Everything was new for us. We learned how to participate in church services, together we memorized the Orthodox calendar’s religious holidays. We realized that we were Russians, that is, Orthodox, like our forefathers were. This was our small spiritual brotherhood.’¹⁰¹ In general, despite the Soviet government’s efforts to the contrary, Russian Orthodoxy still remained a paramount feature of what it meant to be Russian, especially (but not exclusively) among the peasantry.¹⁰² The church as a symbol of Russian national identity probably contributed to an increasing tendency of Russian national identification noted by many German observers in northwest Russia and elsewhere in the occupied Russian territories in 1942–43.¹⁰³

The Pskov Mission’s clergy preached Russian patriotism with an anti-Soviet slant, praying for the victory of the Wehrmacht and sometimes praising Hitler. This stance was not without its contradictions. How did the faithful relate to it? The sources are too sparse for a detailed answer, but most probably welcomed the Russian national message. While many also accepted its anti-Soviet coloration, fewer would be ready to countenance the pro-German message — especially over time, as Nazi Germany revealed herself to more and more people in the occupied territories as equally (or even more) disastrous for Mother Russia than Bolshevism had been. Indeed, the increased salience of Russian patriotism, encouraged by the priests, could easily feed anti-German sentiment — a point not lost on the partisans, as we have seen. The best illustration of religious Russian patriotism turning anti-German (but not necessarily pro-Soviet) is found in the diary of Vasilii Molchanov — the son of a priest — who blended anti-German, religious and Russian patriotic themes in his entries of 1943. Notably, the word ‘Soviet’ or ‘Bolshevik’ is nowhere to be found in his diary entries:

⁹⁹ Skharovskii, ‘Tserkov’ zovet’.

¹⁰⁰ Anisimov, *The German Occupation*, p. 25.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Polchaninov, ‘Pskovskoe sodruzhestvo’, pp. 28–29.

¹⁰² Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity*, Cambridge, 2008, p. 19.

¹⁰³ Enstad, ‘Soviet Citizens’, pp. 272–75.

[How I wish for] the return of everything genuine, of everything Russian. The time will come, in any event, when these cursed Germans will be driven out, they will have to pay with their own lives for the profanation of our Russian land. [...] Lord! Avenge, strike these violators of the Russians with Your wrath. [...] I am completely certain that the Lord will not allow this humiliation of the Russians.¹⁰⁴

Beyond patriotism and politics, a more mundane dimension of popular religiosity was the village feast, which was often connected to a religious holiday. By their participation, the priests restored to the village fairs a traditional element that had been more or less absent following the Bolshevik assault upon religion in the 1930s. As the missionary Georgii Tailov recalled, 'Before every holiday it was necessary to travel around to all the villages [in a parish with about one hundred of them], carry out short prayer services in every house, and on the day of the celebration, liturgy was held in the church, followed by prayers'.¹⁰⁵ Celebrations of religious holidays with the participation of priests reinvigorated an ancient village tradition. The feasts had always been an opportunity for people to remove themselves from the routines and hardships of everyday life. A subversive element could also be involved: as a German report noted in August 1942, popular participation in church affairs was 'lively' to the extent that religious celebrations 'get out of hand', 'keeping many rural workers away from work for days', most likely due to heavy drinking. To prevent this, it was recommended that feasts be limited to one day only.¹⁰⁶ Such scenes represent a likely continuation of 1930s practices through which religious holidays continued to be eagerly observed in the countryside and often seemed, according to Fitzpatrick, 'less like piety than a form of resistance'.¹⁰⁷

To some degree, a generational divide characterized the popular response to religious revival. The young, having been brought up and educated in an atmosphere of Soviet atheism, often appeared less enthusiastic. 'Elderly people receive us with tears of joy in their eyes', recalled one of the missionaries. Youths and children, on the other hand, 'at first looked at us as if stupefied. Most of them were looking at a real-life priestly figure for the first time in their lives, having until then seen them only in the shape

¹⁰⁴ 'Dnevnik Vasiliia Molchanova', entries of 23 May, 13 June, and 19 July 1943.

¹⁰⁵ Tailov, 'Vospominaniia', p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ BA-MA, RH 22/263, p. 139bs, Der Kommandierende General der Sicherungstruppen u. Befehlshaber im Heeresgebiet Nord, Ia/VII, 'Monatsbericht', 15 August 1942.

¹⁰⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, p. 207.

of caricatures and cartoons in anti-religious publications'.¹⁰⁸ In February 1942, German military officials noted that while most people took a keen interest in church life, the youth remained 'very reserved'.¹⁰⁹

Yet there was no universal dismissal of the church among the young. Some German reports and other evidence suggest that many youngsters *did* take an interest in church life, and more so as time went by. German officials often noted that youngsters were turning up for services and church events alongside the older generations.¹¹⁰ Some of the priests successfully organized evangelical study groups for younger people. According to Aleksii Ionov, the demand for such groups at the time greatly exceeded his capacity.¹¹¹ Georgii Benigsen reported to the head of the Mission in October 1942 that he was pleasantly surprised after meeting with the sixty students at the Pskov School of Arts (aged seventeen to twenty-two), where he taught Scripture lessons: 'You can work with these youngsters, and the work can be fruitful and interesting.'¹¹²

Other participants in the Mission recalled after the war that religious lessons were highly popular among Soviet high school teachers.¹¹³ A January 1943 report by the archpriest A. Kushnikov, apparently submitted to local military authorities, suggested that children, too, took a keen interest in religious lessons in the countryside outside Pskov:

At the teachers' conference on 30 January 1943 it was unanimously decided that religion will be taught in schools, because parents and the pupils themselves demand it. Yesterday the mother of an eight-year-old girl told me that the girl would not go to school unless there were religious lessons. [...] Pupils in the Piatchino village are so interested that they stay behind after class, asking the teacher to tell them bible stories. The same is reported by teachers in Brovsk, Kirikovo and Ostrov. The fact that the 100

¹⁰⁸ Benigsen, 'Khristos Pobeditel', pp. 135–36.

¹⁰⁹ BA-MA, RH 26-285/42, p. 36, Sicherungs-Division 285, Abt. VII, 'Betr.: Lagebericht', 7 February 1942. See also BA-MA, RH 26-281/31, 281. Sich.Div., VII, 'Betr.: Lagebericht für Januar 1943', 23 January 1943.

¹¹⁰ PA AA, R 60768, p. 8, V.A.A. beim AOK 18. 'Die politische und wirtschaftliche Lage in dem bisher besetzten Teil von Nordwestrussland', 9 November 1941; BA-MA, RH 22/259, p. 243, Befehlshaber d. rückw. Heeres-Geb. Nord, VII, 'Lagebericht', 15 March 1942; BArch, R 58/222, p. 12, Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Kommandostab, 'Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten Nr. 28', 6 November 1942; BA-MA, RH 26-281/31, Sich.Div. 281, Abt. VII, 'Betr.: Lagebericht für Mai 1943', 22 May 1943; BA-MA, RH 26-281/14, 281. Sicherungs-Division, Abt. Ic, 'Erfahrungsbericht', 25 June 1943.

¹¹¹ Ionov, 'Zapiski missionera'.

¹¹² GAPO, R-1633/1/3, G. Benigsen to K. Zaits, 2 October 1942.

¹¹³ Alexeev and Stavrou, *The Great Revival*, p. 102.

prayer books that I picked up in Pskov were sold out immediately at one school in Strugi may serve as evidence.¹¹⁴

Some people, of course, were hostile or indifferent to the church. Clearly, many years of Soviet anti-religious propaganda had left its mark: 'Bolshevik-influenced segments of the population, particularly worker circles', one German report noted, resisted the priests' overtures.¹¹⁵ Many of the faithful, too, surely rejected the priests for their willingness to pray for a German victory, because they recognized the destructive nature of German rule or because their loved ones were fighting in the Red Army.¹¹⁶

Others recognized a survival tactic in the act of identifying with the church. Seemingly religious acts were sometimes motivated by a sense that such behaviour would serve one's vital interests. According to Georgii Tailov, peasants in a village in the Pushkinskie Gory district stole icons from a nearby church following the German invasion and put them up in their homes 'in order to conceal their anti-religious persuasions'.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Aleksii Ionov recalled an encounter with a peasant who was wearing a self-made cross around his neck made out of Soviet coins. The peasant, displaying no particular interest in the priests, explained his reason for wearing the cross: 'So that the Germans don't take me for a Communist.' This practice, Ionov later learned, was quite widespread, and it may partly explain German observations of icons adorning the corners of most peasant huts.¹¹⁸ Evidently, a powerful rumour had spread throughout the countryside by spring 1942 that the Germans would 'love and spare' people who displayed icons in their homes.¹¹⁹ This rumour was certainly reinforced by another, similar one, rooted in real German practice, which said that the Germans were rounding up and murdering Communists.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ BA-MA, RH 26-285/42, p. 198, 'Bericht', 31 January 1943.

¹¹⁵ BA-MA, RH 22/263, p. 139bs, Der Kommandierende General der Sicherungstruppen u. Befehlshaber im Heeresgebiet Nord, Ia/VII, 'Monatsbericht', 15 August 1942.

¹¹⁶ See Ermolov, *Tri goda bez Stalina*, pp. 280–81. For similar observations on Ukraine, see Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2001, p. 312.

¹¹⁷ When admonished by the priests, however, they returned the icons. See Tailov, 'Vospominaniia', pp. 6–7.

¹¹⁸ Ionov, 'Zapiski missionera'; BA-MA, RH 22/288, p. 52, Der Kommandierende General der Sicherungstruppen u. Befehlshaber im Heeresgebiet Nord, VII, 'Lagebericht', 15 May 1942.

¹¹⁹ During 'mass agitation work' in unoccupied districts of the Leningrad region in March and April 1942, a group of party activists was repeatedly asked by local peasants whether it was true that the Germans treated people with icons in their homes more favourably. St Petersburg, Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov Sankt-Peterburga, f. 24, op. 2d, d. 47, l. 13, 'Otchet za period s 27.3 po 23.4.42', 25 April 1942.

¹²⁰ That this rumour reached northwest Russia as well is confirmed by testimony printed

Conclusion

The revival of the church restored an important dimension in the lives of people in northwest Russia. Simply to be able to freely engage in religious practice again brought relief to large parts of the population. Going to church meant seeking shelter and comfort within the walls of a sacred space where the harshness of war and occupation gave way to choral singing, burning incense and beautiful icons. The widespread participation in church life was not only a testament to the resilience of popular religiosity, but also stemmed from pre-war and wartime suffering and uncertainties.

The priests appealed to a popular sense of Russian patriotism in their capacity as bearers of the thousand-year-old Russian tradition of Orthodoxy, a patriotism which for obvious reasons had anti-Soviet implications. Yet this religiously inspired patriotism could also be turned against the German authorities, especially in 1942–43 as more and more people came to realize that Nazi Germany was a destructive force with no real intention of providing a national future for Russia and the Russians.

On the whole, however, the activities of the Pskov Orthodox Mission enabled German power to function more smoothly. The priests delivered pro-German thanksgiving services and sermons, prayed for Hitler's victory, encouraged people to follow German orders, and sometimes, more fatefully, assisted German security services in their hunt for partisans. They did not do so only because the Germans forced them to, nor were the priests simply puppets of the German security services. Being more than negatively disposed toward the Bolsheviks in the first place, many of them evidently considered it a moral duty to aid what they perceived as a righteous struggle against the atheist Communist regime. In short, the priests were independently anti-Bolshevik. There were limits, however, to their pro-German stance, and most of them were reluctant to enter into close cooperation with German security services. Still, the majority appears to have willingly encouraged the population to support the German war effort. No evidence has been found in German reporting to indicate that the priests and the Mission ever tried to undermine the German order. On the contrary, German officers became more and more convinced that the church was a reliable ally in the struggle for Russian hearts and minds. Even as late as in April 1944, when the German retreat from northwest Russia had been underway for months, some priests were praising German rule in their sermons.¹²¹

in A. V. Vinogradov (ed.), *Okkupatsiia Leningradskoi oblasti v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny (vospominaniia ochevidtsev)*, St Petersburg, 2006, p. 168.

¹²¹ BArch, R 6/75, Der Vertreter des Reichsministeriums für die besetzten Ostgebiete

In the end, the Pskov Orthodox Mission's project to carve out a Russian Orthodox space in the occupied territories was quite successful. The missionaries achieved a great deal with limited means: They helped bring about a popular religious revival, opening more than 200 churches and offering relief and spiritual solace to a large part of the population. In doing so, the Mission also paved the way for the continuing existence of local church life into the late 1950s. Many of the churches opened during the occupation continued to operate after the war, and while many of the Mission's priests fled west or ended up in the Gulag, dozens continued to serve in the churches.¹²²

beim Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Nord, 'Betr.: Haltung und Lage der russischen Bevölkerung im Bereiche der Heeresgruppe Nord', 14 April 1944.

¹²² Oboznyi, *Istoriia Pskovskoi Pravoslavnoi Missii*, pp. 507–15.