A METHODIST VENTURE IN BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA

Donald Carl Malone

On March 17, 1917 a telegram was received in the offices of the Board of Foreign Missions in New York City from George A. Simons in Petrograd. The telegram stated simply, "Church property intact. All well." This communication was the source of much rejoicing, for the primary concern of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution was the safety of its missionaries in Russia.¹

Simons' legacy in the Russian Methodist mission dated back to 1860 when F.W. Flocken of the Bulgaria mission at Shumla went to minister to Russians in Tultcha on the Danube, baptising four Russian children and gaining his first convert, Gabriel Elieff. The first Russian Methodist chapel was built at Tultcha in 1868. Although Flocken found friendly cooperation among the Molokan and Lipovan sects, there was bitter opposition from the rest of the population. The persecution forced Flocken to flee, and the mission was eventually abandoned.²

Nevertheless, the Methodist Episcopal Church did not lose interest in having a mission in Russia.³ The second attempt began in a more natural way - as an extension of the mission work in Scandinavia. In 1887, B.A. Carlson, Presiding Elder of Finland, received word from Petrograd that a mission could be started there, if a preacher were sent. Carlson was not prepared to begin a mission in Russia, so the request was ignored. A year later a more urgent request was sent, and Carlson went to St. Petersburg accompanied by Bishop Charles H. Fowler and two assistants. The work was facilitated by the lifting of restrictions on religious freedom by the Russian Empire that same year. A preaching hall was rented, and a small society was organized in August of 1888. In 1892 Bishop Isaac W. Joyce separated the

³"Progression in Russia," Daily Christian Advocate, VII (May 24, 1876), 5.
Petrograd Mission from the Finnish Mission. However, the response in Russia was not sufficient to maintain a separate mission and it was soon combined again with the work in Finland.

In 1907 George A. Simons, a popular director of German immigrant work in the New York Harbor Mission, was appointed to superintend the work in Finland and Russia. In 1911, Bishop William Burt reorganized a separate Russian Mission Conference with thirteen preachers, fifteen charges, four buildings, three deaconesses, and five hundred members.

Simons' ministry in Russia was an unqualified success. His followers increased rapidly, and their work extended into social concerns and publishing interests. Methodists in the United States were justly proud of their extension into what was considered the last missionary frontier. Before the Russian Revolution, Simons was awarded the Russian Red Cross, was made a Chevalier of the Order of the White Rose in Finland, and was made a Knight in the Order of the Stars by the Republic of Latvia.

When the Russian Revolution erupted, George Simons saw the difficulty which had to be endured "for the gospel's sake" as an unprecedented opportunity. The Russian people were freed from the dark ages of the Romanoff dynasty, and the free churches were placed on an equal footing with Russian Orthodoxy. If not the enthusiasm, at least the hope of Simons was shared by his church.

The Methodist Episcopal Church Board of Foreign Missions


George A. Simons, "A Rare Opportunity in Russia," Daily Christian Advocate, XVII (May 28, 1912), 734f.


Douglass, 267.


continued to be anxious about Simons, and in spite of a second “All well” telegram, the board recalled Simons and his sister, Attilie A. Simons, who was working in the Russian Mission with her brother. However, Simons failed to respond to the recall. Simons and his sister did not leave Petrograd until they were ordered to do so by the United States Government in October of 1918. Thus the work in Russia was left to Sister Anna Eklund, a Finnish deaconess educated at the Methodist Institute and Hospital at Frankfort-am-Main in Germany and appointed as head deaconess in Russia in 1908, while Simons remained close by in Finland. The only reports of the Russian work during this period came from two Methodist preachers fleeing to Finland in January and April of 1919. They reported that Anna Eklund and her followers had sold their furniture and were starving, but were persisting. Sister Eklund was imprisoned for a time, but with the help of Pastor Oscar Poeld, her “young Timothy,” the mission did survive. Even in the face of the trial of revolution, Bishop John L. Nuelsen, episcopal leader of the European area, proposed to the 1920 General Conference a strengthening of the Russian Mission because “Russia presents a mission opportunity of unprecedented magnitude and importance.”

In 1921 a massive famine struck Russia, and thousands died of starvation. Abandoned and emaciated children wandered the streets of Moscow, and those on the verge of death made their way to the cemetery to be assured of burial in consecrated ground. Dogs and crows tore at the flesh of bodies heaped in pits for mass burial. Hoards of starving people moved across Russia to Moscow where they thought aid was available. Relief from America was cautious because of the questionable political motivations of the Bolsheviki who had seized control of the Russian government, and because of the doubtful ability of Russians to distribute goods equitably, or to distribute goods at all. However, relief came from the American Relief Agency under Herbert Hoover and many churches and church agencies, including the Federal

Council of Churches, the American Friends Service Committee, the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church.\textsuperscript{16}

The Methodist Mission in Petrograd had been involved in relief work even before the famine. The Methodist foothold therefore proved advantageous when the famine struck. George Simons believed that the best way to counteract Bolshevism was by bettering the living conditions of the Russian people.\textsuperscript{17} Simons requested relief funds from American Methodists, and he and Bishop Nuelsen stationed themselves in Finland where they could oversee the work in Petrograd, making frequent trips there.\textsuperscript{18} Later the work was transferred from under the direction of Bishop Nuelsen in the German Area to the Scandinavian Area under Bishop Bast, because Bast had secured the assistance of the Danish government for the shipment of relief goods through Finland to Sister Eklund and Pastor Poeld in Petrograd. Simons moved his headquarters from Helsingfors, Finland to Riga, Latvia to


\textsuperscript{17}Henry Clay Foster, "A Centenary Cargo for the Baltic Republics," \textit{Christian Advocate}, XCV (February 12, 1920), 225. Simons supported the Provisional Government, as did most Americans, for it promised a government patterned after European constitutionalism. However, from the beginning of the Russian revolution the Soviet of Workers and Soldier's Deputies were in unofficial control. A faction of the Soviet called the Bolsheviki, later the Communist Party, eventually seized control. Therefore, Simons' support of the revolution, but not of the Bolsheviki, is not inconsistent.

be closer to the relief work. 19

Thus, due to the efforts of George Simons, Attilie Simons, Sister Eklund, and Pastor Poeld, the mission in Petrograd not only survived the famine but prospered. 20 Traveling through Russia in the interest of famine relief in October of 1922, Bishop Nuelsen said, "There is a hunger for the bread of life stronger than I have seen anywhere in Europe." He boasted of Methodist progress in Russia and reported that he preached to capacity crowds in Petrograd, ordaining four men there. 21 It was on that trip that Bishop Nuelsen took an interest in a faction of Russian Orthodoxy called the "Living Church." 22

II

The Russian Orthodox Church found itself in a peculiar situation at the time of the revolution. Since the election of the Duma in 1906, the church was in the position of defending autocracy. The abdication of Nicholas II and the establishment of a Provisional Government placed the church in an uncertain position. 23 The subsequent victory of the Bolsheviks was disaster for Russian Orthodoxy.

At first the Russian Church was hopeful that its position would not be altered under the Provisional Government. However, even the reaffirming of the Religious Toleration Decree of April 17, 1905, abolishing Orthodoxy's position over Evangelicals, Catholics, Baptists (German Lutherans), sects, and Jews, was not acceptable to the church. The office of Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod was transferred to the Ministry of Religion and placed in the hands of a liberal, Vladimir Lvov, a member of the old Duma. Lvov promptly removed the old reactionary members of the Holy Synod and replaced them with moderates and liberals. 24 This act was an irritation to the church, but gave strength to a group of "The Thirty-Two" liberal professors and priests who had been urging for "renovation" of the church since

21"Bishop Nuelsen Out of Russia," Christian Advocate, XCVII (November 23, 1922), 1467.
22"Bishop Nuelsen Reports on Russia," Christian Century, XL (January 4, 1923), 22f.
This group of "Thirty-two" organized the All-Russian Union of Democratic Orthodox Clergy and Laymen in Petrograd under the chairmanship of Reverend D. Popov, with Dean Alexis Vvedensky as secretary. However, the power was still in the hands of the conservative Black or monastic clergy, who took immediate measures to protect their position by claiming government recognition and support for the church and church educational functions. The Provisional Government, however, did not consent to this claim. To further protect the conservative position an All-Russian Church Conference or Sobor was called on August 15, 1917. There were 265 representatives at the sobor, including ninety-one priests, eleven military representatives, nine counts and princes, eight capitalists, forty-three peasants, and six workers. A number of foreign representatives were also present, including John R. Mott, General Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association and a Methodist, who spoke to the sobor.

To give stability to the Russian Church which had been thrown into a turmoil by the revolution, it seemed necessary to the conservatives, who composed the majority of the sobor, to reinstate the patriarchate. Although the Renovators stalled on this decision, the issue was pressed by the violent upheaval of October 25, 1917 and by fear of a Bolshevik takeover. On October 30, while shots were fired in the streets outside, the decision was made in spite of an incomplete quorum. Metropolitan Anthony KhраМovitsky, Archbishop Arsений, and Metropolitan Basil Ivanovich Belevин, former professor of Pskov and Metropolitan of North America and the Aleutian Islands, were nominated. According to the decree of 1634, lots were cast at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, and Nonagenarian Anchoite Alexis drew Belevin's name. Belevin was enthroned under the name "Tихон" at the Cathedral of the Assumption on November 21.

Patriarch Tихон proved to be a vigorous opponent of the Bolsheviki. Nevertheless, the position of the Russian Orthodox Church continued to lose ground. Church administration was limited, and the functions of education and birth and marriage registration were taken

26Curtiss, loc. cit.; Miliukov, 154f., 168; Spinka, 69-85.
27Curtiss, 27f.
29The patriarchate was abolished by Peter the Great in 1702 and was replaced by the Holy Synod.
from the church. 31 The Renovators, on the other hand, who liked Tikhon no better than they liked his office, enjoyed a favored position with both the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks. The Renovators had a misguided hope that the change in government would pave the way for a progressive movement in the church. 32

So the religious situation in Russia became a triangular struggle. The government, soon firmly under Bolshevik control, saw religion as a remnant of the old Tsarist regime eventually to be eliminated. The Renovators were seeking an opportunity for their own changes in the shifts of the revolution. The Renovators and the Bolshevik government were aligned in a cooperation of opposites to persecute the Patriarchal Church. 33

In spite of Patriarch Tikhon’s pronouncements against the Bolshevik government, and in spite of popular protests in support of the church, persecutions against the church increased in severity and soon became a national policy. The state, in addition to withdrawing the church’s function of education and holding records, also withdrew financial support, ordered marriages to be performed by the state, nationalized all church property, and abolished the central administration of the church, forcing local control. To the decree of January 23, 1918 ordering “the separation of the church from the state and of schools from the church” was added on July 6, 1918, “and freedom of religious or anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens.” Thus, the church was severely restricted. But the state was not restricted in anti-religious activity. Churches were closed and priests who resisted were assassinated. 34

The Famine of 1921 brought even more persecutions. The state took the opportunity to confiscate church property to be sold to feed the hungry poor. The church was willing to give up unconsecrated objects (consecrated objects often had little market value anyway) and to raise funds through its constituency, but the state wanted all. The resistance of Patriarch Tikhon and his priests provided the state an excuse for violence against the church. 35 The Renovators supported the government seizures in pious expressions of the church’s obligation to

33 Durany, 61ff.; Miliukov, 171, 177; Spinka, 190-196.
34 Miliukov, 158-164; Spinka, 104-115; Hecker, 67-70; “The Bolsheviki Antagonizing Religion,” Literary Digest, LVI (March 2, 1918), 35f. An interesting development during this period was that Bolshevism began to replace the church as a religion, taking over the ritual functions including baptism. Cf. Durany, 70-74, 76-81; “Bolshevism as a Religion,” Literary Digest, LVI (February 2, 1918), 29f.; “Russia’s New Gods,” Literary Digest, LVII (April 6, 1918), 41.
35 Durany, 57-61; Miliukov, 167ff., 170; Spinka, 175-177.
the poor, thus proving their willingness to support the Bolshevik government.36

On May 12, 1922 Tikhon was arrested by the authorities for his resistance to and criticisms of the Bolshevik efforts, and also on charges that he had sent consecrated bread to the Tsar when he was imprisoned at Ekaterinburg, and that he had supported outside resistance. Tikhon was held at the Don Monastery unable to administer the church affairs. Having foreseen this possibility, Tikhon appointed Metropolitan Benjamin to become Locum Tenens should anything happen to him. However, Benjamin had already been arrested, and was subsequently executed on July 6, 1922. Therefore, Metropolitan Agathangel was appointed to sit in the Patriarchal chair, with Bishop Innocent to replace Agathangel. Agathangel was also arrested, and Innocent was prohibited to travel to Moscow. Thus the way was open for a takeover by the Renovators.37

Before Tikhon learned of the impossibility of his successors taking office, he granted the Renovators, who now called themselves the "Living Church," permission to occupy the chancery. With that occupation also went assumed authority. On May 20, 1922 the Living Church formed the Provisional Ecclesiastical Administration led by Bishop Antonin.38

The first action of the new administration was to call a second All Russian Sobor to be convened on August 9, 1922 for the organization of a new church. However, the Renovators were far from united, and in the midst of strife the sobor was postponed until February 2, 1923 and again until April 29, 1923.39 In the meantime a power struggle was occurring between three factions: the Living Church, which was the leading body, led by Krasnitsky; the Regeneration of the Church headed by Antonius, and the Ancient Apostolic Church under Alexander Vvedensky. Instead of a sobor, secret meetings were held in attempts to work out minor differences, which were primarily concerned with the status of monasticism and married clergy and with the personalities of the leaders. In addition to conflict within the Renovators, there was conflict without, for the Patriarchal Party was still very much alive. To assure a majority of votes at the Sobor, the Living Church engaged in an action of purging priests in the Patriarchal Party by reorganizing parishes, imprisonment, and banishment. Many others shunned the sobor because they considered it non-canonical, so when the sobor finally met only a handful of the

36Miliukov, 163f., 171.
37Durany, 61-67; Hecker, 82ff.; Miliukov, 171ff.; Spinka, 198-208.
39Anderson, 82; Miliukov, 177; Spinka, 236; Paxton Hibben, "The Church in Russia," Christian Century, XXXIX (December 28, 1922), 1590-1592.
Patriarchal Party members were present.\textsuperscript{40}

The Second All Russian Sobor of 1923 convened on April 29 at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow under the questionable and probably forged endorsement of Patriarch Tikhon.\textsuperscript{41} Early on the agenda was the in absentia trial of Patriarch Tikhon, who was found guilty of producing church discord and unfrocked.\textsuperscript{42} The sobor also gave support to the Bolshevik government, lifted celebat restrictions on the episcopacy, formed a decree against superstitious veneration of relics, and adopted the Gregorian calendar.\textsuperscript{43}

However, the sobor failed to unite the Russian church and failed to establish the Living Church as the predominant religious body in Russia. The Renovators remained schismatic and were not popular among the laity. This failure was unsettling to the Bolsheviki. The government, unable to shatter the Patriarchal Party and realizing the futility of making a martyr of Tikhon, now sought reconciliation with the ex-Patriarch. The authorities gave Tikhon to understand that if he agreed to make a statement of confession, he would be released from prison. On the eve of his trial, June 15, 1925, Tikhon recanted and agreed not to oppose the Soviet government.\textsuperscript{44} Although there were rumors that the confession was forged, that Tikhon was ill and not responsible for his statements, or that he was forced to sign a statement, apparently Tikhon had only come to realize that his situation demanded a more conciliatory stance.\textsuperscript{45}

A reversal in the church then ensued. The Living Church found itself embarrassed by its seizure of power, as the released Tikhon emerged as the natural and still popular leader of the church.\textsuperscript{46} With the masses rallying behind him, Tikhon began to form a new church which was synodical and conciliatory. With the help of the new leader of the Renovators, Metropolitan Eudokim of Odessa, a union was formed between the Patriarchal Party and the Living Church, retaining elements of both the old and the new. Only a remnant of the

\textsuperscript{40}Miliukov, 177ff.; Spinka, 236; Louis O. Hartman, "The Religious Situation in Russia," \textit{Missionary Review of the World}, XLVI (August 1923), 611-619.

\textsuperscript{41}Hartman, \textit{loc. cit.}; Miliukov, 176-181; Spinka, 240-245.

\textsuperscript{42}Duranty, 67f.; Hecker, 99f.; Miliukov, 176, 180; Spinka, 240-245.


\textsuperscript{46}Duranty, 74-81; Miliukov, 183.
Living Church did not join in the union. Both the Apostolic Church and the Union of Church Regeneration refused to unite, but most of the members of both groups went over to the new church.\(^{47}\)

Although the division in the church continued, the schismatic groups either came into union with the new Russian Orthodox Church or faded into obscurity. Thus the church in Russia was no longer the Living Church but the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.\(^{48}\)

Patriarch Tikhon died on April 7, 1925. On that same day Metropolitan Peter Krutitsky, who had been with the patriarch just before his death, emerged with a questionable testament allegedly signed earlier by Tikhon naming Metropolitan Cyril or Agathaniel as his successors, and should they be unable to succeed him, Metropolitan Peter. Both Cyril and Agathaniel were restricted from Moscow, so Peter became *Locum Tenens*. A sobor, which Peter refused to attend, was held on October 1, 1925, and Archbishop Sergei of Novgorod was elected patriarch.\(^{49}\)

Tikhon was patriarch from 1917 to 1925, Sergei from 1926 to 1936, and Alexei from 1944 to 1945. With each came a necessary growing relationship to the Soviet Government - conciliation with Tikhon, recognition with Sergei, and cooperation with Alexei.\(^{50}\)

\section*{III}

As the breakdown in the Russian Orthodox Church progressed, other religious bodies increased their interest in Russia.

Dr. William Feltner of the Moody Institute in Chicago began training Russian students for future work in Russia at the Russian Bible and Educational Institute in Philadelphia. In August of 1918 he formed the Russian Missionary and Education Society to send 2,000 evangelists into Russia and build a tabernacle, orphanage, and educational and vocational school in Moscow.\(^{51}\) The ambitious goal was never realized.

Another group taking advantage of the breakdown in the Russian church and of the relaxing of religious persecution after 1918 was the Roman Catholic Church. Although strong in Poland, Roman Catholicism had remained a minor force in Russia because of the

\(^{50}\)Spinka, The Church in Soviet Russia, ix.£.  
strength of Russian Orthodoxy. When the Soviet Government showed open disfavor for the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church entertained hopes of replacing Orthodoxy by finding favor with the Soviets, and the Soviet Government gave them reason to hope. But their hopes were dashed when the Soviet Government turned against the Catholics, as it had once turned against Orthodoxy, this time in favor of the new form of Orthodoxy, the Living Church.52

The Episcopal Protestant Church and the Russian Orthodox Church in North America have been on friendly terms for many years, exchanging pulpits nationwide and exploring possibilities for church union. Therefore, Episcopalian viewed developments of Orthodoxy in Russia with intense interest.53 The Episcopal Church was among the first to send relief to Russia during the famine, choosing to work through the Orthodox Church instead of independently.54

It was Episcopalian Bishop William T. Manning of New York who came to the aid of Eulogius Platon, Russian Orthodox Archbishop of the Diocese of North America, when John S. Kedrovsky, Archbishop of Kherson and Odessa in Russia and an American citizen, was assigned by the Sobor of 1923 to the Diocese of North America and presented himself on Platon’s doorstep with an unsigned document from Tikhon. Since Platon did not recognize the Living Church, he refused to yield his office, and Bishop Manning supported him in the ensuing litigation. The New York Supreme Court at first ruled in Platon’s favor, but relying heavily upon the testimony of Louis O. Hartman, editor of the Methodist publication, Zion’s Herald, later reversed its decision. Again Bishop Manning came to Platon’s aid providing the use of St. Augustine’s Chapel at Trinity Church in New


54"Bishop Endorses Plan to Send Fish to Russia," Christian Century, XXXVIII (October 27, 1921), 24; "Will Aid the Unfortunate Russian Clergy," Christian Century, XXXIX (December 8, 1921), 26.
York for the remnant of Platon's followers.\textsuperscript{55}

No denomination, however, became more entangled in Russian religious affairs than the Methodist Episcopal Church. There was no need for Methodists to move into Russia for they were already there before the revolution, and although the Methodist mission was not large, it was strong enough to endure the revolution and the famine.

While on a visitation to the Methodist Mission in Russia, Bishop John L. Nuelsen, one of the three Methodist episcopal leaders of Europe, became intrigued with the Living Church movement, and the Living Church in turn intrigued with Methodism. Bishop Nuelsen and Archbishop Antonin of Moscow met together in 1922 with the conclusion that the objectives of their two churches were very similar. Bishop Nuelsen was interested in establishing a church in Russia built upon a social democratic basis, and Archbishop Antonin believed that the experience of Methodists in establishing a free church in America would be valuable to the Living Church. Already a translation of the American Social Creed of the Church (which had its origins in Methodism) was being circulated among the churches in Russia. Dr. Julius Hecker, a Russian-born Methodist scholar, had given Archbishop Antonin a copy of the \textit{Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church}, and parts of that book were being reprinted for circulation in Russia.\textsuperscript{56}

For Nuelsen the time of his meeting with Antonin was the right time for a revival of religion in Russia. Religious persecutions of the past were subsiding, and a new interest in religion was growing. Nuelsen stood ready to assist in the rebuilding of a new church free of the anarchy and rigidness of the past.\textsuperscript{57}


During the meeting Antonin invited Nuelsen and other representatives of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Federal Council of Churches to attend the sobor to be held on December 10, 1923. The formal invitation from Vladimir Krasnitsky, president of the Living Church, came to Nuelsen along with a note of gratitude for famine relief in December of 1922. Nuelsen was elated:

This means that the most rigid and dogmatic church on the globe is relenting and opening the gates to the audience of the Gospel and that now in the critical hour when they are forming their constitution, they do not look to the church that has commanded during the centuries the Seven Hills of Rome; they are looking to the church that has occupied the Eighth Hill of Rome.

The Board of Bishops shared Nuelsen’s enthusiasm and issued this statement:

The importance and delicacy of the situation thus created can scarcely be overestimated. It is highly flattering to Methodist pride to be singled out as an expert in organization by the high administrative body of one of the oldest and most numerous churches in the world.

However, the enthusiasm was not unanimous. Bishop Richard J. Cooke, who had followed Bolshevik advances with considerable concern for many years, was not warm to the invitation. Although agreeing that a new church was needed in Russia, and agreeing that the Soviet Government had become more lenient toward religion, he believed that the Living Church was too schismatic to succeed and too much aligned with Marxism to be cooperative with Methodism. Nor did Bishop Nuelsen receive a favorable response when he presented his report to the Board of Foreign Missions in November 1922.

The Board of Bishops requested that the three European Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Bishop Anton Bast of the Copenhagen Area, Bishop Edgar Blake of the Paris Area, and Bishop John L.

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58Nuelsen, loc. cit.; Hecker, 95.
59“The New Church in Russia,” Christian Advocate, XCVII (December 21, 1922), 1610.
61“The Expedition in Moscow,” Christian Advocate, XCVIII (January 4, 1923), 4f.
63Louis O. Hartman, “The Russian Church Reformation,” California Christian Advocate, LXXI (June 14, 1923), 7, 14f.
Nuelsen of the Zurich Area, attend the sobor in February. Also President L.H. Murlin of Boston University, who had visited George Simons in 1917 and returned to the United States to raise funds to purchase Simons an automobile, and Louis O. Hartman (later Bishop Hartman), editor of Zion's Herald and supporter of Nuelsen's relief work in Germany after the Great War, planned to attend. Bishop W.B. Beauchamp and Reverend John Vancura were appointed to represent the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In February 1922, Nuelsen, Blake, and Bast met in Berlin to depart together for the sobor in Moscow. However, word was received that the sobor had been postponed until April 15, 1923. At the time the postponement seemed to be only a minor irritation, but the events which were soon to ensue transformed Methodist pride into Methodist embarrassment.

IV

In March 1923 several Roman Catholic priests were arrested for refusing to yield church property for the relief of famine victims, which was regarded as counter-revolutionary action, and were tried in a Soviet court with M. Krylenko as prosecutor. Prominent among the priests were Archbishop Zepliak, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Russia, and a Polish priest, Vicar General Constantine Butchkavitsch, who was also charged with treason as a Polish spy. Krylenko demanded the death penalty for the two priests and for Vicar General Kocheyvo, who had insulted the court by stating that he appealed to a "higher tribunal than yours." Archbishop Zepliak and Vicar General Butchkavitsch were sentenced to death, five priests were given ten-year sentences, eight priests were given three-year sentences, and a choir boy was acquitted.

Early in the morning on March 31, 1923, Butchkavitsch was taken to the cellar of the Cheka (Secret Police) Building and shot in the back of the head. His body was disposed of without Christian burial, and the event was not announced until four days later.

64 "Representatives to Russia," Christian Advocate, XCVII (November 30, 1922), 1514.
69 Ibid., March 27, 1923, pp. 1, 6.
70 Ibid., April 5, 1923, pp. 1, 3.
Zepliak was sent to prison for a ten-year sentence which he was not expected to live out, and indeed his health began to fail in prison. Three years later Zepliak was released but died of pneumonia before he could sail for Rome.\footnote{71}{Ibid., March 31, 1923, pp. 1f.; ibid., May 15, 1923, p. 3; “Archbishop Cieplak Dead,” \textit{Christian Century}, XLIII (March 4, 1926), 301f.}

Although the persecution of religious leaders in Russia was nothing new,\footnote{72}{1,766,188 people were executed by the Bolsheviki before 1922. Cf. “The Red Church of Russia,” \textit{Literary Digest}, LXXV (?ctober 14, 1922), 39f.} a wave of protest against the trial of the Catholic priests came from the Pope in Rome, the House of Commons in England, T.P. O’Connor representing Ireland, Premier Sikorski of Warsaw, the Catholic Welfare Council, Secretary of State Charles Hughes at the request of American Catholics, the Reformed Rabbis of the United States, and many other religious bodies and national governments.\footnote{73}{A news article in \textit{New York Times}, March 28, 1923, pp. 1, 4; a news article in \textit{New York Times}, March 29, 1923, pp. 1, 4; a news article in \textit{New York Times}, March 30, 1923, pp. 1, 3.}

Although the protests may have given the Soviets reason to ponder, they quickly decided that they should not let Capitalists define Bolshevik policy and carried out the execution, followed by an announcement that Patriarch Tikhon would be tried on April 10.\footnote{74}{Ibid., March 31, 1923, pp. 1, 2.}

Protests magnified after the execution.\footnote{75}{Ibid., March 31, 1923, p. 19; “Europe Astir Over the Red Killings,” \textit{Literary Digest}, LXXVII (May 19, 1923), 12f.} The Soviets countered with threats against the Pope, by tightening censorship of news relating to the incident, and by refusing to renew the six month visa of American reporter Francis McCullagh of the \textit{New York Herald}.\footnote{76}{“On the Holy Front in Russia,” \textit{Literary Digest}, LXXVII (May 19, 1923), 19; a news article in \textit{New York Times}, April 19, 1923, p. 3.}

McCullagh was himself a point of controversy. Being the only American present at the trial, he was the sole source of all news which reached the United States. The accuracy of McCullagh’s characterization of the trial as a mockery of justice came into question because he was a Catholic. Speaking about Krylenko, McCullagh said, “Of all the blood thirsty, wild beasts I have ever set eyes on, Krylenko is the worst.”\footnote{77}{“All Faiths United by the Red Assault on Religion,” \textit{Literary Digest}, LXXVII (April 21, 1923), 33-35; “The Methodist Split on Russia’s New Church,” \textit{Literary Digest}, LXXVIII (June 28, 1923), 30f.; “Russia and Religion,” \textit{Christian Century}, XL (May 10, 1923), 581; “The Martyrs of Moscow,” \textit{Christian Advocate}, XCVIII (April 12, 1923), 452f.}

So vehement was the reaction of the American people to the story of the Butchkavitsch execution which reached them that Secretary of
State Charles Hughes was forced to cancel the much anticipated visit of Madam Kalinin, the wife of one of the signers of the execution order, to the United States. At the invitation of the American Red Cross, Madam Kalinin was to make the trip as a representative of the Russian Red Cross on behalf of Russia's poor and Russia's children. 78

Overlooking McCullagh's Catholic sentiments, most Methodists accepted the accuracy of his reports and were appalled by the events. 79 For Frank Mason North, Chairman of the Board of Foreign Missions, the reports confirmed suspicions of the insidiousness of the Soviet Government. 80 John R. Mott, General Secretary of the Y.M.C.A., and Harold Williams, director of foreign news for the (British) Methodist Times, also sided with McCullagh. 81 However, Bishop Edgar Blake and Dr. Louis Hartman believed that McCullagh's Catholic bias had colored the story 82 and agreed with Senator William E. Borah, a proponent for recognition of the Soviet Government, that Butchkavitsch was in fact guilty and that the evidence in the trial gave proof of that guilt. 83

Hope was expressed by American religious leaders that when the three Methodist bishops went to Russia they would carry a strong reprimand to the Soviet authorities. 84 This hope was based on the mistaken notion that the Methodist bishops shared the sentiments of most religious leaders, and that they would have contact with Soviet authorities. It was also spoken without the knowledge that there was now serious question whether or not the visit would be made.

The Butchkavitsch execution embarrassed both the Roman Catholic Church, which had dreams of replacing the defunct Russian Orthodox Church in Russia, and the American Methodists, who sought to evangelize Russia through the organization of a new church to

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80 "Bolshevism's 'Public Challenge to God'," Literary Digest, LXXVII (April 14, 1923), 7-9.
81 John B. Ascham, "Interview with Captain McCullagh," Christian Advocate, XCVIII (September 27, 1923), 1182.
83 "Bolshevism's 'Public Challenge to God'," Loc. Cit.
replace Russian Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{85}

However, Bishop Blake would not be deterred from his original plans, even in the face of threats upon Patriarch Tikhon's life, suspicions of involvement with the Soviet Government, and rumors that the project had been abandoned. To him the opportunity was too great to be easily abandoned, and he was determined to go to Russia.\textsuperscript{86}

When the sobor was called for April 29, 1923, Bishop Nuelsen was unable to attend because of an episcopal appointment, and Bishop Bast was ill. Therefore, Bishop Nuelsen requested Bishop Blake and Dr. Hartman to represent the Methodist Episcopal Church at the sobor.\textsuperscript{87}

In the meantime, a secret session of the Board of Bishops meeting in Wichita, Kansas denounced Bishop Nuelsen's proposal to assist the Living Church and recalled Bishop Blake. Although Bishop Blake was already on his way to Russia and could not have received the recall, and although each Bishop was responsible to the General Conference and not to the Board of Bishops, to the general public Blake's arrival in Moscow seemed to constitute disobedience.\textsuperscript{88}

Bishop Blake and Dr. Hartman were sympathetic with most of the decisions of the sobor - approving total separation of church and state, lifting celibate restrictions of the episcopacy, forming a decree against the superstitious veneration of relics, and adopting the Gregorian calendar - but considered the defrocking of Patriarch Tikhon in absentia to be a mistake.\textsuperscript{89}

One of the outstanding features of the sobor was the address of Bishop Blake, which he delivered on May 2, and because of which he was made an honorary member of the sobor.\textsuperscript{90} In his speech Blake emphasized the unity of the church, and in that spirit pledged his assistance to the church in Russia in its time of trial. At least by implication he also pledged the aid of the Methodist Episcopal


\textsuperscript{86}A news article in \textit{New York Times}, April 12, 1923, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{87}Blake, \textit{loc. cit.}

\textsuperscript{88}“The Bishop’s Cold Feet,” \textit{Christian Century}, XL (May 17, 1923), 613; “Bishop Blake Was in Moscow,” \textit{California Christian Advocate}, LXLI (May 19, 1923), 5.


Church.\textsuperscript{91}

When your call came across the seas we answered with but one desire, and that is to aid the Russian Church and the Russian people. If in anything we can serve you, you have only to ask. Tell us what you want and, so far as our resources will permit, it shall be done.\textsuperscript{92}

The Russians did not hesitate to ask. Since the revolution all of the theological academies operated by the Russian Orthodox Church had been closed, leaving theological education one of the critical problems of the church. Soon after Blake’s address Bishop Antonin, Metropolitan Peter, and Archbishop Vvedensky requested the advice of the Methodists on training for priests. Blake readily promised to raise $50,000 in the United States between January 1, 1924 and January 1, 1927, upon Bishop Nuelsen’s approval, to be used for the opening of a theological academy. Until the school could be opened, and for those who could not attend a school, Blake set up a plan for training ministers by correspondence courses, using professors of the old theological academies who were now scattered throughout the country. This system was patterned after the Methodist course of study in use in America. Blake and the members of the sobor also formed a Board of Education for the Russian Church with Bishop Nuelsen as a member.\textsuperscript{93}

However, the Board of Foreign Missions at its annual meeting on November 19, 1923 refused to endorse the pledge. An attorney, William H. VanBenschaten, who served on the board as chairman of the Finance Committee, made a resolution which was adopted by the board:

> It is resolved that it shall be the policy of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church to carry on its work in Russia, in general, through the direct channels of the board of our church, and that every provision possible as to both workers and finances be made for such work. And it is further resolved that the board shall not conduct any of its work in Russia through the new Russian Orthodox Church nor have any working connection or relation with, nor financially assist that church.\textsuperscript{94}

However, Hartman proudly announced that funds were already being raised anyway, and that the assistance of the Board of Foreign Missions was not needed. Appeals were being made through articles and advertisements in church periodicals to establish the \textit{Zion's Herald} Russian Fund for the project. Nine of these were Methodist publications and eight were publications of other denominations. Two Methodist periodicals refused to cooperate on grounds that aid to the new church

\textsuperscript{91}Edgar Blake, “Bishop Blake's Address at Moscow,” \textit{Christian Century}, XL (June 21, 1923), 791, 198; “The All-Russian Council of the Orthodox Church in Moscow,” \textit{California Christian Advocate}, LXXI (June 14, 1923), 6f.

\textsuperscript{92}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{93}Hartman, “The Russian Church Reformation,” \textit{Loc. Cit.}

was aid to the communist government.\textsuperscript{95}

When the first payment was due at the beginning of the year, $3,000 was sent to Russia for the opening of a theological school in Moscow, and another $33,000 in pledges had been obtained.\textsuperscript{96}

The Moscow Theological Academy was reopened on Sunday, November 25, 1923. The school, which was founded in 1913, had been closed by the Bolsheviki. Metropolitan Eudokim was to be the head of the seminary, and the staff consisted of six theological professors, one Greek teacher, one modern language teacher, one secretary, and a librarian. The professors were Bishop Goerge Dobronrovov, Professor Popoff, Alexander Vvedensky, Dr. Julius F. Hecker (a Methodist minister), Metropolitan Eudokim, and Bishop Krassatin. Fifty students had enrolled the first year, and it was expected that the enrollment would soon reach 100. The reopened school gained enough acceptance by the Russian government that its three year curriculum was printed in \textit{Isvestia}.\textsuperscript{97}

On March 16, 1924 Metropolitan Ryazan opened a second seminary at Leningrad (Petrograd) on the \textit{Zion's Herald} Russian Fund. This was the second step in the plan to found seminaries across the country in Hamel, Odessa, Kharkof, Ekaterinodar, Saratof, Zlatoust, Tomsk, and Irkutsk.\textsuperscript{98} The fund also enabled the publication of a monthly paper, \textit{The Christian}, by the Moscow Theological Academy.\textsuperscript{99}

On a visit to the two schools in 1925, Bishop Nuelsen wrote to Hartman that both were progressing well. Later in 1926 Nuelsen, while visiting the Moscow Theological Academy, reported that theological education in Russia was very limited and was still in need of support from American Protestants without whom there would be no theological education. Nuelsen felt that the school lacked evangelical fervor which


\textsuperscript{96}Hartman, “The Methodists and Red Orthodoxy,” \textit{loc. cit.}


\textsuperscript{98}“Second Theological Seminary Opened in Russia,” \textit{Christian Century}, XLI (May 1, 1924), 673.

made Protestant support all the more critical.100  

The gratitude of the Russian Church for Methodist support was genuine. An unexpected cablegram was received on May 10 at the 1924 General Conference which was signed by Metropolitan Eudokim and read:

The Holy Synod sends fraternal greetings to your great Conference, trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide you wisely at this time of unprecedented need for world peace. Our church will never forget the Samaritan service which Bishops Blake, Nuelsen, Doctors Hartman, Hecker, and your whole church has unselfishly rendered us. May this be the beginning of closer friendship for our churches and nations.101  

At the death of Patriarch Tikhon in 1925, the new chairman of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Seraphim of Moscow, wrote to Bishop Nuelsen:

The services rendered by Bishops Blake and Nuelsen and by Drs. Hartman and Hecker and by the American Methodists and other Christian friends will go down in the history of the Orthodox Church as one of its brightest pages in that dark and trying time of the church.102  

However, in the United States there was serious reservation about the project. In the first place it seemed that the Board of Bishops' recall of Bishop Blake constituted a rebuke to those who framed the proposal. Bishop Blake claimed that the recall was not as important an issue as the public made it to be. The Board of Bishops claimed that the visit to the sobor was not as important as the public made it to be, characterizing it, in a public statement, as "only a friendly visit."103 Still the controversy raged, some admiring Blake, Nuelsen, Hartman, and Hecker for their courage and foresight, and others believing that they failed to understand the ruthlessness of the Soviets and had been taken in. Rumors were spread that Bishop Blake had been pick-pocketed in Moscow, and that he had made pro-Soviet statements.104

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101"The Soviet Living Church," California Christian Advocate, LXXII (February 7, 1924), 5.  
102"Russian Church Thanks Methodists for Aid," Christian Century, LXII (May 23, 1925), 709.  
So heated was the controversy among Methodist bishops that a closed door meeting of the Board of Bishops was called in December of 1923 at Simpson Methodist Church in Brooklyn to settle the matter. The bishops emerged smiling with a compromise resolution, containing neither a reprimand nor an apology, but simply thanking Bishops Blake and Nuelsen for their work in Russia.105

Bishop Nuelsen suggested a major shift in Russian work at the General Conference of 1924. Although the Russian mission had grown in membership from 825 to 3,212 in the past four years, it seemed to Nuelsen that the $6,000 per year spent for the Russian mission could be more effectively used in assistance to the Russian Church. George Simons was operating effectively with headquarters in Riga and was permitted to travel in Russia. Sister Anna Eklund continued her work in Leningrad. Publications were being printed in Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian. However, the mission, although remarkably strong in the Baltic, had retreated primarily to that area.106

Therefore, Nuelsen proposed that evangelical leaders be sent to Russia to assist the Russian Church, that a leading Methodist professor and a leading Methodist pastor be sent each year to teach in a Russian theological academy, and that six to ten Russian theological students be brought to study in American schools each year.107

V

Nuelsen’s proposals were never to be realized for the $6,000 per year allotment was already rapidly dwindling. In 1926 Bishop Nuelsen reported that, in spite of the reduction in funds, Anna Eklund and Oscar Poeld were still working in Leningrad, and that the Talonpoika brothers had begun work in Ingermanland. Because of the opportunity in Russia, other denominations were beginning to do the work which Methodists were unable to fund. Although Nuelsen did not regret that others were doing the work, he still believed that “Russia needs Methodism.”108

The Annual Conference in Riga in 1927 marked the twentieth anniversary of the Russian Mission. Simons was honored for his service and looked back upon the history of the mission with pride. However, the

105“Methodist Bishops Meet in New York,” Christian Century, XL (December 6, 1923), 1592f.
107Ibid.
future looked bleak. Apportionments to the mission had been cut by 50 percent and membership had dropped to 2,122. Still Bishop Blake, who spoke at the conference, was hopeful. He spoke of the strategical importance of the mission and announced his intentions to attempt to raise a jubilee fund for the mission in America.  

By the end of that year the Methodist mission was in full support of the Soviet Government. Bishop Nuelsen and Bishop Blake complained bitterly about the cut in mission funds at the 1928 General Conference. Nuelsen said:

We are doing the best that is possible under the circumstances, but I am bound to state that it is very little — not creditable to the great Methodist Church.

He went on to say that “Methodism is marking time in Russia.”

The Russian Mission continued to decline and eventually retreated to Estonia. At the outbreak of World War II the mission was cut off from its mother church and became independent. Although the church was very small and was under Soviet persecution, it remained faithful and was respected by other religious groups.

In 1963 Bishop Odd Hagen of Stockholm was permitted to visit the virtually forgotten Estonian church for the first time since the war and to hold its first annual conference in twenty years. From his visit came the remarkable report that Methodism in Estonia not only survived the hardships of the war and of the Stalin era, but had been legalized by the Russian government (April 1961), was 1,000 members strong, and was growing.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to trace the effect of Methodist influence upon Russian Orthodoxy. However, Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and Novgorod, who was instrumental in the Russian Orthodox Church’s decision to enter the World Council of Churches, was educated in the late 1940s through a correspondence course arranged by the Leningrad Theological Academy.

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110 “Our Methodism Soviet,” *Northwest Christian Advocate*, LXXV (December 1, 1927), 1132.
114 “Methodist Church in Russia,” *Together*, VII (July 1963), II.
VI

The courageous behavior of those who sought a new form of mission to Russia is not unusual in Methodist history, nor is the controversy surrounding that activity. The episode typifies American Methodism: Cautious and traditional yet bold and innovative, highly structured yet individualistic, proud and self-preserving yet ecumenical and cooperative. Those same characteristics are evident in Methodism even today.

Two approaches can be seen in the Russian Mission: On the one hand there was the traditional evangelistic mission and on the other there was an attempt to assist indigenous Christians to develop their own ministry. Both approaches had their value, but now the results of both approaches seem almost negligible. Nevertheless, one can safely say that Methodism left its mark on Russia.