IN LUBIANKA'S SHADOW

The Memoirs of an American Priest in Stalin's Moscow, 1934–1945

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INTRODUCTION

Father Léopold Braun

An Assumptionist Priest in Stalin’s Moscow, 1934–1945

BY G. M. HAMBURG

From 1934 to 1999 Assumptionists from the United States served as chaplains to the American embassy in Moscow. For much of the same period they acted as pastors of the venerable St. Louis des Français Church, located across the street from the Lubianka prison, the main political prison in the Soviet capital. Under Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev, whose hostility to Catholicism in particular and religion in general was undisguised, the American Assumptionists were among the few ordained priests legally permitted to operate a Catholic church or chapel in central Russia. Given the extraordinary difficulties under which they worked—multiple pressures from the Soviet government, uneven support from U.S. and Western diplomatic corps, physical isolation from their religious community, and a paucity of material resources—the American chaplains’ survival in Moscow is a remarkable, virtually untold episode in Church history and in the annals of the Cold War.

Among the American chaplains perhaps the most remarkable figure was Father Marie-Léopold Braun (1903–64), who served in Moscow from 1934 to 1945. During those twelve years as embassy chaplain and priest at the St. Louis des Français church Braun ministered to a mixed congregation of diplomats from the United States and the Catholic countries of Europe, to Russian Catholics displaced from other churches, and to members of various confessions, who,
for a variety of reasons connected with political events, had lost their own places of worship and had come to the “foreigners’ church” to participate in Christian rites. After the August 1936 departure from Moscow of Braun’s mentor and immediate superior, Bishop Pie Neveu, Braun had to cope alone with his small congregation’s urgent needs. In the extreme circumstances of the Stalin purges and the Second World War Braun confronted personal surveillance and harassment by the Soviet political police, the arrest of many parishioners, periodic attempts by the Soviet government to seize the church’s assets or close it, as well as five robberies of church property and two desecrations of the altar. By putting hard-won knowledge to good use, he kept alive the Catholic clerical presence in Moscow and laid a foundation upon which his successors from the Assumptionist order might build. Because of Braun’s strategic importance in the Assumptionists’ Russian mission and the intrinsic significance of his actions as a religious leader in Stalin’s time, study of his Moscow chaplaincy and pastorate is justified.

This essay will be divided into five parts: first, a short history of the Assumptionist mission to Russia before 1934 and a consideration of Soviet policies toward religion from 1917 to 1941; second, a brief comment on Braun’s apprenticeship to Bishop Neveu from 1934 to 1936; third, a more extended discussion of his activity between 1936 and 1941; fourth, a brief treatment of Braun’s deeds during the Second World War; and fifth, a history of Braun’s memoirs. The essay will draw on Braun’s personal papers in the Assumptionist archives in Boston, Massachusetts, and on his correspondence in the Archivio dei Padri Assumptionisti in Rome.

In the present essay the larger Soviet historical context of Braun’s work in Moscow will be sketched out only where necessary to clarify his actions. Braun’s reactions to the Stalinist “show trials” from 1936 to 1938 constitute a separate theme too complex to analyze here.

I

The Assumptionists’ presence in twentieth-century Russia was a long-term consequence of their founder’s conviction that unification of the Christian Churches would require “attacking the Photian Schism” at its Eastern source. Already in 1862 Father Emmanuel d’Alzon sought permission from Rome to investigate the possibility of a mission in Bulgaria or in Istanbul itself. By fall 1863 he had won approval to found a primary school in Plovdiv (Philippopoli), Bulgaria. From this small foothold, the Assumptionists expanded their activity
to a small seminary in Plovdiv and a school in Adrianople under the newly founded Oblates of the Assumption. In Father d’Alzon’s mind, strengthening Bulgarian Catholics was a crucial step in a larger strategy designed to persuade authorities of the Orthodox Church to rejoin Rome. He hoped that a powerful Catholic position in Bulgaria would exert pressure directly on the ecumenical patriarch and indirectly on the Russian Holy Synod to take into account the pope’s desire to negotiate an end to Christendom’s “scandalous” division. To increase pressure on the Russians, d’Alzon envisioned a direct Assumptionist role in Russia. In 1873 he challenged the order’s general chapter to consider “conquering Russia.” He even devised a plan to send priests in laymen’s garb to Odessa to study the Russian language and to undertake a clandestine mission there.

In his thinking about Russia, d’Alzon followed the intuition that the political situation in the empire would surely change in a radical fashion, one favorable to the Catholic cause. For a time in the 1860s he fantasized that it might be possible to convert the tsar to Catholicism, with the result being the reunification of churches by political decree. By the late 1870s d’Alzon had discarded this notion in favor of another—namely, that Russian nihilists would soon succeed in overthrowing the Romanov dynasty. “The nihilists will carry out their work of destruction,” he said, “and upon this ground buffeted by revolutionary tempests we shall plant the true cross.” In retrospect, d’Alzon’s views on Catholicism’s prospects in Russia may seem ill-informed or even utopian, but some of his perspectives were shared by a number of contemporaries. In Russia the great philosopher Vladimir Sergeevich Solov’ev projected the unification of humanity under the spiritual aegis of the pope and the political authority of the Russian emperor. In the 1870s the conviction that the Romanov dynasty could not last became widespread among the political elites; in the period between 1878 and 1881, the height of the terrorist movement, despair over the regime’s long-term survival gripped even the royal family. Among Russian conservatives, such as Minister of Education Dmitrii Andreevich Tolstoi and the novelist Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, there was fear that the Catholic Church would be the chief beneficiary of Russia’s internal problems.

Although Father d’Alzon died in 1880 without seeing the realization of his Russian mission, his commitment to an Assumptionist presence in the East provided the impetus for those of his followers who embraced the cause of Church unity through an Eastern apostolate. Between 1880 and 1903, under the leadership of Father François Picard, the order undertook a series of steps to deepen its involvement in the East. Among these steps were the following: active encouragement of the Eastern or Byzantine rite in celebrating liturgy through the opening of an Eastern-rite chapel at Plovdiv and an Eastern-rite church at
Plovdiv in 1888; the exercise of pastoral responsibility over Greeks and Latins in Istanbul and Kadikoy in 1895; the training of more than one hundred French Assumptionists for priesthood in the East by 1900; the foundation in 1895 of research into the history of the Byzantine Church at the Leonine seminary in Kadikoy, under the supervision of Father Louis Petit; and the publication of a scholarly journal, *Echos d’Orient*, on Byzantine Church history. These measures in Southern Europe created the liturgical, ecclesiastical, demographic, and intellectual preconditions necessary for the order to extend its Eastern apostolate into Russia.

Between 1903 and 1907 six Assumptionists received permission from Russian authorities to enter Russia. Formally speaking, their roles were limited to teaching at the St. Petersburg Catholic Ecclesiastical Academy, to ministering to French Catholic colonies in the cities of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Vilnius, and Odessa, and to conducting pastoral work among French nationals in the industrialized Donets Basin. Under Russian law, the Assumptionists were prohibited from engaging in missionary activity of the sort Father d’Alzon had once projected. In fact, until 1905 evangelization by non-Orthodox clergy was punishable by arrest. Even after the imperial ukase on religious toleration of 17 April 1905, when this blanket ban on evangelization was lifted, the process of religious conversion could legally occur only under police supervision and with the caveat that a would-be convert must submit to counseling by Orthodox priests before ratifying the conversion. Besides the constraints on missionary activity, the Assumptionists had to respect imperial regulations prohibiting activity by Catholic religious orders. Although belonging to a foreign order, each Assumptionist had been admitted into Russia as a secular priest, with papers signed by the bishop in the diocese of his birth. Any communication with another member of the order designed to coordinate their activity risked violation of the law and expulsion of all members of the order from Russia. Under the circumstances, individual Assumptionists had to operate discreetly in their respective spheres and largely outside the effective jurisdiction of their own superior general. It is no wonder that Father Pie Neveu called the first years of the Assumptionist mission in Russia “amusing, sad, and most of all incredible.”

The inconveniences confronting the Assumptionists during the first decade of their Russian apostolate were considerable, but they should not be exaggerated. Since the Assumptionists served a well-defined ethnic constituency in the foreign Catholic community, they had at best a marginal impact on ethnic Russians and therefore posed no threat to the Orthodox Church establishment as such. It is true that between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches there was a two-century history of “mutual aversion” that persisted
in certain quarters until 1917, yet most Russian churchmen understood that the Russian empire had long been multiconfessional. They therefore regarded Catholic activity as a parallel, even complementary Christian mission inside the empire—a mission that required proper oversight, to be sure, but one that had its own legitimacy and inner logic. Absent the Great War and the revolutions of 1917, the Assumptionists in Russia might have continued to serve French-speaking Catholics and might well have gradually enhanced their cultural profile within Russia by contributing to the education of future priests at the Catholic Ecclesiastical Academy in St. Petersburg. Almost certainly, they would not have had the opportunity to occupy center stage in Russian religious life that these events afforded.

Before 1914 there were more than 5 million Catholics living in the Russian empire, most of them concentrated in the Baltic territories, western periphery, Belorussia, and Ukraine. A recent breakdown counted 1.25 million Catholics in Lithuania and southern Latvia; 2.2 million in Belorussia; over 1 million in the Archdiocese of Mogilev, which comprehended much of central Russia; and 800,000 in the Right-Bank Ukraine. Roughly 400,000 more Catholics lived in the far-flung Tiraspol diocese, which extended from the southern Ukraine/Black Sea region in the southwest all the way to the Tungai region of Siberia in the East. A substantial number of the empire’s Catholics, perhaps even a majority, could trace their cultural and spiritual roots to the former Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth—a polity that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been Muscovy’s most potent rival in the international sphere. It was therefore a common stereotype for Russians to identify the empire’s Catholics as “Poles,” but the religious and ethnic realities were far more complex than the stereotype would admit.

When the Great War commenced in August 1914, the lives of Catholics in the Russian empire were disrupted in some predictable, and not so predictable, ways. During the war’s first weeks, many foreign Catholic residents left Russia either under compulsion or voluntarily. Austrian and German colonists, including priests and nuns, were interned, then expelled from Russia. French and Belgian Catholics sometimes chose to depart for their homeland to be near family or to fulfill outstanding military service requirements. The sudden exit of so many foreign Catholics, a development that occurred not only in Russia but also in Turkey, forced the Assumptionists to reorganize their entire apostolate in the East. For a time it was unclear whether any Assumptionists would remain in the East at all.

During the nearly four years of warfare that ensued, approximately 700,000 Catholic men were conscripted unto the Russian imperial army. At first, there
were no Catholic military chaplains attending them, but over time the imperial government permitted Catholic priests to enter the chaplaincy for that purpose. This policy was a major concession to the empire's Catholic subjects, and was therefore a positive indicator of the empire's political trajectory on the delicate question of religious rights. Unfortunately, the fighting itself went badly for the imperial army. There were extensive casualties among conscripted troops of all confessional backgrounds. Worse yet, troop movements through the Baltic territories, western peripheries, and Ukraine, as well as intense fighting in those regions, led to waves of internal refugees from the affected zones. Moreover, by September 1915 the Russian army had been driven out of Lithuania and most of Latvia. By March 1918 victorious Germans had forced the Russians to divest all their Baltic possessions, the entirety of Ukraine, and all of Transcaucasia—that is, most of the territory in which the tsar's Catholic subjects had lived before the war.

Of course, neither the Russian monarchy nor the empire itself survived the war. The abdication by Nicholas II in March 1917 and the formation of the revolutionary Provisional Government led Russia's political elites to reconsider every element of existing law, including regulations applying to religion. Under two laws promulgated in July 1917, the Provisional Government granted freedom of conscience to every citizen of Russia. Under the new laws, at age fourteen individuals gained the right to declare their religious affiliations, to shift from one confession to another, or to reject religious allegiance of any sort. The government recognized individuals' freedom to associate with one another for religious purposes, freedom of speech in religious matters, freedom of religious communities to construct their own places of worship and to build schools for their coreligionists. At a single stroke, the Provisional Government settled countless points of contention between Orthodoxy and Russia's non-Orthodox confessions, including Catholics. However, the legislation of July 1917 had little impact on Catholic life. At the time of promulgation, Russian sovereignty over the prewar imperial Catholic populace had virtually dissolved. When Russian power finally reasserted itself in the western peripheral provinces and Ukraine, the Provisional Government had been overthrown by a new regime hostile to all religions both in principle and in practice.

That the founder of the Bolshevik party, Vladimir Il’ich Lenin, implacably opposed religious belief and sought to eradicate “religious prejudices” is a point beyond dispute. In his 1909 article “On the Attitude of the Workers’ Party to Religion,” Lenin wrote, “Marxism is materialism. As such, it is mercilessly hostile toward religion.” He argued that the proletariat’s “helplessness before the blind forces of capitalism . . . is the deepest contemporary root of religion.”
another place, Lenin held that religion “offers [exploiters] a very cheap way of justifying their existence as exploiters and selling them at a very modest price tickets to well-being in heaven.” As for proletarians, he wrote, “Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of a human being.”16 Philosophically, Lenin rejected every sort of Idealism out of the conviction that any deviation from strict materialism was a concession to religion. In one intemperate passage of his book Materialism and Empiriocriticism he even labeled professors of philosophy “stewards of the theologians.”17 For Lenin, as Leszek Kolakowski has observed, the elemental social antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie corresponded to the division between materialists and Idealists, with the latter identified ideologically with religious belief.18 Although not every Bolshevik took such a stark view of the philosophical opposition between Marxism and Idealism, the party leadership followed Lenin in desiring to eradicate organized Christianity in Soviet Russia. After 1917 Bolshevik debates over religion focused not on the party’s goal—the eventual elimination of religion—but on the efficacy of various tactics to achieve that end and on the pace at which the anti-religious campaign should be conducted.

The first quarter century of Bolshevik policy toward religion can be divided into three phases. During the first phase, from 1917 to 1922, the revolutionary government promulgated basic laws restricting the legal rights of Churches in the public sphere and regulating religious practice. This phase, which coincided with the Russian civil war and with the Russo-Polish war, witnessed the forced closure of many churches and the execution of priests suspected of counter-revolutionary activity. The climax of this phase came during the Volga famine of 1922–23 when the Bolshevik leadership took advantage of the need for famine relief to confiscate Church property and arrested prominent clergymen. The second phase of party policy toward Churches lasted from 1923 to 1928. At this juncture the government employed mass propaganda against religion and in favor of atheism as a means to undercut popular religiosity, thereby diminishing church attendance and undermining Christianity. Simultaneously, the government continued to deploy coercion against prominent clergymen and strove to close churches whenever a pretext for doing so presented itself. From 1929 to 1941 the party continued its propaganda against religion and launched a new wave of coercion against the major religious confessions. During the Stalinist effort to collectivize agriculture, hundreds of village churches were closed and countless priests were arrested. At the same time, many of the operating churches in large cities were either converted from religious to secular use, boarded up, or dynamited. During the Great Terror between 1936 and 1938 virtually no Soviet
citizen who was a believer was safe from arrest. Membership in a Church community could be construed by state prosecutors as membership in a counter-revolutionary organization, and thus as a pretext for arrest, exile, imprisonment at hard labor, or even execution. The cumulative impact of Bolshevik policy against religion devastated Church hierarchies, destroyed Church communities that had cohered for decades, and discouraged believers from practicing their faith.

In pondering this dismal picture, we should highlight those phenomena that affected Soviet Catholics generally and the Assumptionists in particular. Virtually all of the initial Bolshevik legislation on religion had a deleterious impact on the Catholic Church. In the decree of 26 October/8 November 1917 the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets abolished private ownership of land and transferred its control to local communities. This decree deprived the Orthodox and Catholics of ownership of church buildings, rectories, cemeteries, and the land on which they stood. The law meant that, although Catholics might still enjoy temporary use of churches and other facilities, they now lacked the economic resources to maintain those structures. Under the decree of 11 December 1917, the commissar of education ordered Churches to hand over control of schools to the new state authorities and to surrender control of school buildings and property as well. In a decree of 21 January 1918 the teaching of religious doctrines “in all state and public schools or in private schools where general subjects are taught” was prohibited. These two decrees made it difficult for Catholic parochial schools and Orthodox parish schools to teach tenets of the Christian faith. For Russian Assumptionists the new school laws meant that they could no longer participate as part of the staff of the St. Petersburg Catholic Theological Academy.

By the same decree of 21 January 1918 the Soviet declared the separation of Church and state in Russia. The decree was aimed, first and foremost, against the Orthodox Church, which was stripped of its standing as the established Church and put on the same legal footing as other denominations. Superficial non-Orthodox readers of the decree, including the Assumptionist priest Pie Neveu, regarded its effects as a boon to Russian Catholics since the law unambiguously acknowledged the individual’s right “to confess any religion or none at all,” and seemed to confirm the Provisional Government’s July decree on religious toleration. Unfortunately, the fine print specified that no churches or religious organizations “have the rights of a legal person.” This provision meant that believers joined in a collective could not make binding contracts under Soviet civil law. From parish to national level, churches now lacked standing under Soviet law, and so were at the mercy of local secular authorities.
On 24 August 1918 the Commissariat of Justice issued a regulation requiring citizens who wished to use church buildings for worship to form councils of at least twenty persons, to register their names with the local Soviet, and to use the building in accordance with Soviet law. This regulation was especially problematic under Catholic canon law, for it augmented the laity’s power within parishes by seeming to deprive priests of the direction of their parishes.

Finally, the July 1918 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic formally granted citizens the right to engage in “religious propaganda.” However, this provision was hedged about with ominous restrictions. The constitution spoke of “true freedom of conscience for workers,” thereby implying that “nonworkers” would not be permitted freedom of religion. Under article thirteen the constitution denied first-class citizenship to “those who do not work for their income” and to “monks and clergy.” Thus, the constitution created a legal foundation for the arrest of clergymen practicing their faith. Moreover, the constitution granted everyone the freedom to engage in “antireligious propaganda.” This constitutional principle was the thin entering wedge for public and private harassment of believers in subsequent decades. What was most insidious about the early Soviet religious legislation was its formal ambiguity: the letter of the law could be read as protecting religious liberty or as restricting it, depending on the local context. This ambiguity gave Soviet authorities a tremendous advantage when they came under attack domestically or internationally for persecuting religion, for they could always point to a law’s apparently progressive passages. That the Soviets did not succeed in completely undermining the Catholic Church through this battery of legislation is a testimony to the depth of believers’ faith rather than to the benefits they theoretically derived from Soviet laws.

The Russian civil war from 1918 to 1922 and the Russo-Polish war of 1919–21 both had a deleterious effect on the Catholic Church. The civil war was fought partly in areas already devastated during the latter years of the Great War—namely in Belorussia, Ukraine, the western periphery, and southwest, where the bulk of Russia’s Catholics lived. To the degree that Catholics were caught up in the fighting, they exposed themselves, their priests, and churches to attack by belligerent factions. Although no reliable statistics reveal the number of Catholics killed and arrested or the number of churches closed or torched during the civil war, anecdotal information suggests that the numbers were not trivial. The Russo-Polish war, fought partly in the border region of the western Ukraine, Lithuania, and the border provinces of Poland, also strongly affected Catholics and their churches. The historian Norman Davies has noted that “the fighting
in the Polish-Soviet war was undoubtedly vicious. The Poles frequently shot captured commissars outright. The Soviets shot and cut the throats of priests and landlords.”

The writer Isaac Babel, a soldier-journalist posted to the Red cavalry, has left a haunting diary entry recording the look of a sacked Catholic church in Berestechko: “Vestments torn up, precious, shimmering fabrics in tatters, on the floor, the nurse made off with three bales, linings were ripped open, candles stolen, chests caved in, papal bulls thrown about, money pocketed. . . . The verger quivers like a bird, writhes, speaks a mixture of Russian and Polish, . . . ‘They’re wild beasts, they’ve come to wreck and rob, it’s obvious, the old gods are being destroyed.’”

From Babel’s writing it is clear that observant Soviets saw the war against Poland in both national and religious terms, not just as an international class struggle. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the war deepened the association between Catholicism and “counterrevolution,” as perceived by the Soviet authorities.

Perhaps the crucial moment in the first phase of early Soviet religious history came during the Volga famine of 1921–22. According to official data, the hunger affected nearly 22 million people, most of them living in the Volga basin and Ural region but also in Kazakhstan and Ukraine. There were as many as a million deaths. In response to this humanitarian crisis, the Churches did their best to organize charitable assistance. In August 1921 the Russian Orthodox patriarch Tikhon called on his brother patriarchs, the pope, and various Protestant leaders to contribute to famine relief. That same month the Catholic archbishop of the Mogilev diocese, John Cieplak, appealed to Catholics inside and outside Russia to help with famine relief. Almost immediately Pope Benedict XV pledged a million lire to underwrite the efforts of Cieplak and other Catholics in Russia to aid famine victims. During the next summer, his successor, Pius XI, sent another 10 million lire to Russian relief and authorized a mission under Father Edmund Walsh to oversee food distribution in Russia. As part of the diplomacy between the Vatican and the Soviet regime, the Holy See pressed for a quid pro quo—namely, genuine recognition by the Soviets of freedom of religion. Instead, the Soviet leadership used the pretext of famine suffering as justification for confiscating from churches what remained of their valuables and for arresting their leaders.

The key legal document in the 1922–23 antireligious campaign was the decree of 23 February 1922, which ordered churches in Soviet Russia to hand over to the state all their valuables, including sacred vessels. Financially, the government expected a windfall from the sale of these valuables of “several hundred million gold rubles (or even several billions),” according to Lenin’s estimate. However, the main benefit to the state was not financial but political. The Bol-
shevik leadership anticipated that Church authorities would refuse to surrender sacred vessels to the state, and that this refusal could be used as grounds for their arrest. In his characteristically aggressive letter of 19 March 1922 to the Politburo, Lenin predicted that, if the government moved against the clergy “with maximal speed and mercilessness,” it could “guarantee [its] position for many decades.” Following the script as they were bound to do under canon law, both Patriarch Tikhon and Archbishop Cieplak instructed their parish clergy to withhold sacred vessels from the government. The result in the Orthodox case is well known: the house arrest of Tikhon in spring 1922; the May 1922 arrest in Petrograd of Metropolitan Veniamin; the 1922 “show trials” of Orthodox bishops and priests in the two capitals; and preparations by the judiciary for a 1923 trial of the patriarch himself. The result for Catholics, following substantial resistance to party efforts to confiscate church valuables, was remarkably similar. The government arrested Archbishop Cieplak, his close assistant Monsignor Constantine Budkiewicz, and thirteen other priests. They were tried in March 1923 in Moscow on charges of counterrevolution, and found guilty. The court sentenced Cieplak and Budkiewicz to death. Later the archbishop’s sentence was commuted to ten years’ imprisonment. Although the government was careful in its public pronouncements and judicial actions to distinguish between Orthodox and Catholic resistance to the February decree, it regarded these apparently discrete steps as part of a single, coordinated campaign to undermine organized religion. Recently released archival documents demonstrate that the Cieplak trial in March 1923 was regarded by party authorities as preparation for a projected show trial of the patriarch.

The first phase of Bolshevik policy on religion had significantly weakened the organizational cohesion of the two largest Christian denominations by harassing, arresting, and imprisoning clergymen. It had also diminished the churches’ institutional power by confiscating places of worship, land, and movable valuables. Yet the resort to coercion had not been without cost to the Soviet government, which faced substantial international criticism over the 1922 and 1923 show trials. Moreover, the campaign to confiscate church valuables had provoked resistance from both the Orthodox and the Catholic populations. In March–April 1922 there were protests against confiscations in Belorussia and in nine provinces of Soviet Russia. In sixteen provinces of Russia confiscation proceeded only by armed force. From the Bolshevik perspective, the popular religious resistance was especially disturbing because it reminded party leaders of their still weak hold over workers and peasants. Between 1923 and 1928, therefore, the Soviet government shifted resources from direct confrontation of the Churches to antireligious propaganda. The organization spearheading the propaganda
effort was the League of the Militant Godless, under the leadership of Emel’ian Mikhailovich Yaroslavskii. Its chief publication was the mass newspaper Bezbozhnik. According to a recent history of the League by Daniel Peris, the circulation of Bezbozhnik varied from 210,000 copies in 1925, to 172,000 in 1929, to over 500,000 in the early 1930s. The League supplemented its newspaper with more specialized brochures and pamphlets whose print runs ranged from 2,000 to 5,000 copies. The League’s propaganda in the mid-1920s tended to depict priests as economic exploiters of the peasantry and as practiced deceivers of their parishioners. Bezbozhnik also served as the vehicle for serial publication of Yaroslavskii’s Bible for Believers and Nonbelievers, an exposé of religion’s irrationalism and a defense of science. After its appearance in Bezbozhnik, Yaroslavskii’s book was issued in hardcover and became a standard source for training party cadres throughout the Stalin era. Yaroslavskii’s rationalist critique of religion was part of a broader move by Bolshevik leaders to promote science and the scientific worldview as an alternative to religion. In Soviet science there was no pretense of value neutrality. As William Husband has noted, Soviet ethnographic research in the mid-1920s was deliberately designed to promote antireligious propaganda.

Recent Western scholarship on Soviet antireligion has tended to emphasize the shortcomings of Yaroslavskii and his League of the Militant Godless. Husband has observed that “neither the number of anti-religious materials nor the quality of those that did appear satisfied Bolshevik leaders.” Peris concluded that the League “champion[ed] Soviet culture as poorly as it had promoted atheism.” He called Soviet atheism “a stunning failure, even beyond the unremarkable performance of the League as an organization.” Although both Husband and Peris offer good reasons for their negative assessment of the Soviet anti-religious program, contemporary believers did not necessarily think the program ineffective. On 8 March 1923 Pie Neveu complained to Father Evrard à propos Bezbozhnik, “The saddest feature of my life at present is the offensive and gross impiety which is showing itself everywhere. Religion is caricatured and attacked, and we seem to be witnessing the triumph of lies.” In 1924–25 Neveu expressed alarm over propaganda accusing Catholic priests of spying for Poland. In February 1925 his own parish council signed a letter demanding that “the Catholic church not be subjected to the orders of the Polish government and that its priests confine themselves exclusively to their ecclesiastical duties without being forced to spy or fight against the government of the workers and peasants of our region.” Neveu felt that his own fate and that of other Catholic priests had “passed into the hands of frightened parishioners.” He wrote Father Gervais Quénard that “it seems obvious our situation cannot long endure.
The abandoned clergy, without bishops and without visible communion with Rome, are helpless.”35 In January 1926, in another frank letter to Quénard, Father Neveu confessed: “We priests are now merely the directors of ceremonies and distributors of the sacraments for the few people who still wish to avail themselves of our ministry. There is no apostolate, no religious instruction of the young, nobody to replace the priests who have died or fled, and no bishop. We are witnessing the death, slow but sure, of Latin Catholicism in Russia.”36

Neveu’s April 1926 consecration as bishop by the Vatican’s emissary, Monsignor Michel d’Herbigny, improved the situation in one crucial respect: it restored to Russian soil the Latin Catholic hierarchy that had been effectively eliminated by the Cieplak show trial in 1923. Nevertheless, the other problems identified by Neveu continued to beset the Church, which, according to all the known statistical indicia, continued to decline throughout the 1920s. Thus, from the Catholic perspective, Soviet antireligious propaganda was a far more serious development than recent historical scholarship has understood.

In 1928–29 the Soviet government launched its program of forced collectivization of agriculture. Collectivization had powerful negative implications for Christian churches of every denomination. In the initial phase of collectivization, party activists identified class enemies—the so-called kulaks—in the countryside, confiscated their properties, and often subjected them to arrest. By legal definition, priests were classified as kulaks, and thus became subject to the dekulakification campaign. Subsequently, in many parts of the country, peasant villages were consolidated and reorganized into larger agro-villages or agro-towns centered on tractor stations. This consolidation of villages sometimes meant resettlement of families into rural barracks inside new settlements where there were no churches. In cases where villages remained intact, the local church was often closed. Across the Soviet Union countless peasants resisted collectivization, and nowhere was the resistance more widespread than in Ukraine.37 There, as Robert Conquest has shown, the government used the hunger of 1932–33 as a weapon against the Ukrainian peasantry. The death toll in the Ukrainian famine ran into the millions.38 In western Ukraine dekulakification, village resettlement, church closings, and the famine devastated Catholic life.

Collectivization was accompanied by an intensification of antireligious propaganda and by the implementation of new laws limiting religious expression. In a December 1928 editorial Pravda declared there could be no peace between the socialist state and religion.39 A 1929 editorial in the local newspaper Pskovskii nabat accused priests of committing terrorist crimes against collective farms.40 The 1929 congress of the League of the Militant Godless called on the Soviet government to launch a vigorous assault against religion: in addition to the usual
campaign by public organizations to discourage religious belief, the League asked the government to replace the seven-day week with a six-day week, so as to undermine Sunday worship. On the legal front, the government imposed a series of new laws affecting religion. In 1929 it canceled school holidays that coincided with religious celebrations. It replaced the seven-day week with a "continuous" week in which workers’ days off were staggered. It ordered the confiscation and melting down of church bells, ostensibly to provide raw materials for industry. It raised taxes on the use of church buildings and on priests, and it tightened registration requirements for religious societies seeking to worship in public buildings. Finally, an amendment to the Soviet Constitution promulgated on 18 May 1929 eliminated the right of believers to engage in "religious propaganda." This amendment removed any formal right to assemble in public, to speak in defense of one's religious belief, or to disseminate religious information. Believers’ only right was to believe, if that could be done in conformity with the battery of antireligious regulations now on the books.

At the present stage of research, it is impossible to assemble a precise analysis of these policies’ impact on Catholics in the Soviet Union, but a rough picture may nevertheless be drawn. According to a new study by the Reverend Christopher Zugger, the number of operating Latin-rite Catholic churches declined from 1217 in 1917 to 31 in 1935. In the Mogilev diocese most of the decline occurred between 1926 and 1935. Zugger also has estimated that the number of Latin-rite Catholic priests at liberty declined from 892 in 1917 to 22 in 1935. The number of Eastern Catholic priests fell from 69 to 6 during the same period. In the large cities of the Russian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic, the situation of Catholics was critical: in 1930 the largest Catholic church in Leningrad, St. Catherine's, was closed, leaving only the French-owned church of Notre Dame and five suburban parish churches to serve the local populace; in Moscow by 1934 there were only three active Catholic churches, including the French-owned St. Louis des Français, at which the elderly Bishop Neveu presided. As of 1937, according to Zugger, “the last Roman Catholic parishes in Soviet Russia outside the two capitals had been shut down.”

Thus, on the eve of Father Braun’s arrival in Moscow, two propositions could not be gainsaid: first, the Latin-rite Catholic Church in the Soviet Union was in grave danger; and second, owing to a strange trick of history, the Assumption-
ist order, by virtue of Bishop Neveu’s position in Moscow, had central responsibility for keeping the faith from total demise.

Father Braun was admitted into Russia under terms of the Roosevelt-Litvinov agreements, signed at the White House on 16 November 1933. The agreements consisted of eleven letters and one memorandum, in which the U.S. government extended diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union and specified the bases on which that recognition was extended, and in which the Soviets clarified their interpretation of the bases of recognition. The two longest letters in the agreements concerned the issue of the religious freedom of American nationals in the Soviet Union. President Roosevelt informed Litvinov that he expected Americans in the Soviet Union would be allowed “to conduct without annoyance or molestation of any kind religious services and rites of a ceremonial nature ... in churches, houses, or other buildings ... which they will be given the right and opportunity to lease, erect or maintain in convenient situations.” He added that American nationals “will be given the right to have their spiritual needs ministered to by clergymen, priests, rabbis or other ecclesiastical functionaries who are nationals of the United States of America, and that such clergymen, priests, rabbis or ecclesiastical functionaries will be protected from all disability or persecution and will not be denied entry into the territory of the Soviet Union because of their ecclesiastical status.”46 In response, Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov granted the rights demanded by Roosevelt, but in each proviso attached the text of a Soviet law “supporting” the right in question. On the right to “conduct without annoyance or molestation of any kind religious services and rites of ceremonial nature,” Litvinov noted that under the law of 23 January 1918 “a free performance of religious rights is guaranteed so long as it does not interfere with public order and is not accompanied by interference with the rights of citizens of the Soviet Union. Local authorities possess the right in such cases to adopt all necessary measures to preserve public order and safety.” Concerning the “right to lease, erect or maintain in convenient situations” houses of worship, Litvinov repeated articles of the decree of 8 April 1929 requiring individual believers in a religious society to lease church buildings from local soviets under “rules established for houses of worship” and according to “sanitary and technical building regulations.” Litvinov noted that the right to impart religious instruction to children was supported by the decree of 23 January 1918 separating Church from state: “Instruction in religious doctrines is not permitted in any governmental or private schools, nor in private teaching institutions. Persons may give or receive religious instruction in a private manner.” Concerning the right of American nationals “to have their
spiritual needs ministered to by clergymen, priests, rabbis or other ecclesiastical functionaries,” Litvinov made no reference—a significant omission, because it left open the possibility that the Soviets might deny the practical means for implementing the other rights specified. In the last paragraph of his letter, Litvinov reserved to the Soviet government “the right of refusing visas to Americans desiring to enter the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on personal grounds,” but he promised “not to base such refusals on the fact of such persons having an ecclesiastical status.”

For Roosevelt the protection of American nationals’ religious rights in the Soviet Union was a political necessity. In the months of national debate on Soviet recognition that preceded the November 1933 negotiations, there had been fervent opposition to recognition from Catholics and Protestants. Roosevelt’s insistence on including guarantees of religious rights in the recognition agreement was essential to disarming his American religious critics, and, when the negotiations with Litvinov threatened to break down over the religious guarantee, Roosevelt had personally intervened in the discussions. Although Roosevelt was proud of the agreement on religious rights, Litvinov’s response merely interpreted each proviso by citing Soviet laws that, in practice, had limited rather than supported religious freedom. Roosevelt’s actual achievement would be tested by the implementation of the recognition accord.

When the terms of the Roosevelt–Litvinov agreements became public, both the superior general of the Assumptionist order, Father Gervais Quénard, and Bishop Neveu decided to take advantage of the religious provision by proposing an American Assumptionist as chaplain of the U.S. embassy. In this way Quénard could fortify the Assumptionist presence in Russia and Neveu could transfer some of his pressing duties to an assistant. To arrange the matter, Quénard wrote to Father Crescent Armanet, the president of Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, and vicar provincial of the American Assumptionists. In December 1933 Armanet asked Father Braun if he would “go to Russia as chaplain to American Catholics and also act as an aide and secretary to Bishop Neveu.” In the event of Braun’s refusal, Armanet was prepared to nominate himself for the position. Having secured Braun’s acceptance, Armanet then faced the task of persuading the U.S. government to agree to Braun’s inclusion in the Moscow mission.

Armanet met with James Roosevelt, the president’s eldest son, in Boston on 13 January 1934. He secured letters of introduction from Roosevelt to Undersecretary of State William Phillips and to the just–named U.S. ambassador to Moscow, William C. Bullitt. Both Phillips and Bullitt had played important roles in the recent recognition negotiations with Litvinov. On 14 January Armanet
visited Bullitt in the State Department and won Bullitt’s consent to consider sending Father Braun to Moscow. Armanet did not hide from Bullitt the Assumptionists’ desire to assist Bishop Neveu, although he carefully couched his proposal as an initiative “to minister to the spiritual needs of American Catholics in Russia.” Armanet asked Bullitt to include Braun on the embassy staff, or, failing this, “to select him as one of the secretaries to the American consul in Moscow; or as a private tutor to some members of the Ambassador’s family or to some other American official in Moscow.”  

Bullitt told Armanet that he would likely support Braun’s candidacy as minister to American Catholics, but he warned Armanet that Litvinov “will want to know if this priest has ever said or done anything that would indicate anti-Soviet sentiments.” Bullitt asked to meet with Braun in New York on 24 January. At that meeting Bullitt told Braun that he “could not be included officially in the personnel of the embassy.” However, if the Assumptionists would support Braun financially in Moscow, Bullitt would telephone the Soviet embassy in Washington to request a visa for him. Bullitt warned Braun that his conduct in Moscow must be “terribly correct.” He insisted that the “Soviet authorities must have no grounds to reproach you for political interference or violations of their laws.” On 26 January 1934 Braun met with Bullitt again, this time at the State Department. In Braun’s company, Bullitt telephoned the Soviet embassy describing Braun as “an American Catholic priest . . . personally known to me . . . [with] no political affiliations [who] wishes to go to the Soviet Union for religious purposes.” Bullitt added that “we shall consider this a test case of our recent religious agreement because Fr. Braun is the first American clergyman to apply for a visa.” Bullitt’s pointed reference to the religious component of the Roosevelt-Litvinov agreement helped Braun receive his visa on 5 February—an unusually quick turnaround by Soviet standards. Timely receipt of the visa enabled Braun to sail to Europe on the same boat as Bullitt and the U.S. embassy staff.

The Assumptionists’ negotiations with the U.S. State Department suggested reasons for both optimism and concern over Father Braun’s impending mission in Moscow. On the one hand, Bullitt had done everything in his power to facilitate the quick procurement of a visa for Braun. By raising the visa procurement to the level of a “test case” of the Roosevelt-Litvinov agreements, Bullitt had also communicated to Soviet authorities his expectation that Braun would be treated with appropriate respect under the terms of that agreement. On the other hand, Bullitt had declined to make Braun a member of the embassy staff and had demanded that he be supported financially by the Assumptionists. The ambassador was taking care to put distance between diplomatic activity and the exercise of religion, in the process assuring that Braun would operate
autonomously in Moscow. Bullitt’s insistence that Braun conduct be beyond reproach, or “terribly correct,” that the priest should neither say nor do “anything that would indicate anti-Soviet sentiments,” can be read in a number of ways. Perhaps Bullitt’s sole concern was that Braun pass Litvinov’s inspection and that Braun do nothing to complicate U.S.-Soviet relations. Yet there is reason to think that Bullitt himself, as a zealous promoter of U.S.-Soviet friendship, would have been personally uncomfortable with a critic of the Soviet Union being even remotely associated with his embassy. George Kennan, the third secretary of the embassy under Bullitt, has written that “Bullitt came to Russia with high hopes, and he wanted them realized at once.” Kennan doubted these hopes sprang from any ideological sympathy for the Soviet regime: he attributed them instead to Bullitt’s “overoptimism concerning the impressionableness of Soviet leaders.” But Beatrice Farnsworth, Bullitt’s biographer, has held that for Bullitt “Russia represented brotherhood, a spiritual conversion, indeed a state of grace.” In 1919, she noted, Bullitt had visited Moscow as a young diplomat and had written exaggeratedly of the extraordinary social progress Russia had made under the Bolsheviks and of the powerful impression left on him by Lenin. If Farnsworth’s depiction of Bullitt is correct, then the ambassador’s distance from Braun and warning to avoid anti-Soviet sentiments may be understood as a signal to the Assumptionists that Braun should not expect vigorous support from the American embassy in cases where priestly duty might bring Braun into conflict with Soviet officials. On balance, the evidence suggests that Bullitt wished Braun the best and would do what he could to secure the unfettered exercise of religion by Braun so long as that diplomatic intervention did not complicate pursuit of Soviet-American friendship. Bullitt’s attitude was shared by his successor as American ambassador to Moscow, Joseph E. Davies, a man little disposed to make trouble with the Soviets and an even more zealous sponsor of U.S.-Soviet friendship than was Bullitt.

When Braun arrived in Moscow on 1 March 1934 he was not yet thirty years old. In some respects his education was excellent: he spoke English and French with native facility; he had learned German well enough to teach literature at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts; he knew Castillian Spanish and could read Italian; he was a fine pianist and had briefly studied musical theory in London. Unfortunately, Braun came to Moscow without a word of the Russian language, without knowledge of Russian culture or familiarity with the Soviet
political system. He saw himself as “only a young priest understandably bewildered at the very thought of being sent to Moscow.”

During his first two years in Moscow, Braun assisted Neveu at the French church, learned the Russian language, and familiarized himself with Soviet life.

Initially, Braun’s priestly duties were far from onerous. On weekdays he helped open the St. Louis Church at seven in the morning, then attended the bishop at Mass, which was celebrated at a side altar. We do not possess exact numbers for attendance, but a 1933 letter from Neveu estimated “an average of 25 Holy Communions, and to this must be added those who do not communicate.” Because of ongoing antireligious activity, daily Mass attendance may have declined in 1934, but there is no reason to suppose it fell precipitously. On Sundays the priests presided over two services. At nine o’clock Braun offered Mass in English, to a congregation of fifteen English speakers. Most of these congregants were from the British embassy. According to Braun, the number of Catholics in the U.S. embassy was five. At ten o’clock Bishop Neveu, attended by Braun, celebrated High Mass at the main altar in French. Although High Mass was the week’s chief liturgical event, attendance depended on whether Sunday coincided with a rest day (vykhodnoi den’) in the Soviet work calendar. On work Sundays, according to Braun, Mass attendance was only a “sprinkling of people.” On rest Sundays, however, attendance rose significantly. On high holidays, like Easter and Christmas, the church, which could comfortably seat five hundred, was filled to overflowing.

After doing church business in the mornings, Braun took daily lessons in Russian from Neveu or from the Russian tutor engaged by the bishop. According to his memoirs, Braun “declined, conjugated and translated for months on end. I got acquainted with Krylov, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol’ and so many other authors, as I found time to read in the original.” He supplemented these formal lessons by listening to Soviet radio broadcasts whose “splendid, slowly spoken lessons could be heard in impeccable pronunciation.” As Braun advanced in his linguistic competence, he started his own collection of printed materials—mostly books and pamphlets circulated by the League of the Militant Godless. In 1936 he purchased several of the League’s tracts, including a brochure describing the means by which Christianity would be destroyed in the USSR.

To master the complexities of Soviet jargon and popular speech, Braun devised a plan to tour Moscow, section by section, on foot. To disarm pedestrians who might be startled by a foreigner dressed in Roman collar, he walked alongside Neveu’s large, black-and-white Siberian dog, Flip. For a full year in the afternoons he trod the byways of Moscow, “several times exploring its entire
These excursions provided an invaluable education not only in the Russian language but in Soviet life.

At Torgsin stores in central Moscow Braun witnessed poor Russians from “socially harmful” classes (former tsarist officials, people from noble or merchant backgrounds, relatives of priests or foreigners) tearfully surrendering family heirlooms or religious items for food. He watched clerks remove icon covers (rizi) of gold or silver from the icons themselves, assay the metals with acid, then throw the covers on a pile. At the larki of street vendors and at occasional bookstores, Braun saw “old Slavonic in-folios and invaluable church volumes . . . being used as wrapping paper.” At a bookstore on Ulitsa Miasnitskaia he watched a saleswoman wrap purchases with pages “from an immense edition of the Lives of the Saints in Slavonic.”67 Also in central Moscow, Braun witnessed the slow demolition of various Orthodox churches. He saw on Ulitsa Nikol’skaia just off Red Square the marvelous seventeenth-century Kazan’ Cathedral demolished, its teeming tent-rooves and cupola yielding to a soft drink stand. In 1936 in Zemlianoi gorod he noted the gradual demolition of monastery walls and several interior buildings of the Passion Monastery (Strastnoi Monastyr’). He carefully observed passersby and listened to their comments in order to discover their attitudes toward the Orthodox Church and toward Soviet authorities. On the outskirts of Moscow, at a farmers’ market where peasants sold food from their gardens, Braun befriended the market manager, who allowed him to smoke his pipe and listen to interactions of peasant entrepreneurs with their customers. There, Braun reported, “very often there were groups of peasants standing in a circle around an invalid who for his living would read a few verses out of the Bible. Most always it was done in Slavonic, which is the principal tongue of the Eastern rite. This of course was merely tolerated and never encouraged. When darkness came, everybody disbanded and returned to his home. These improvised audiences usually listened with bowed and uncovered heads to the reading of scriptural texts.” Apparently Braun listened to such readings on more than one occasion and from more than one reader. He noticed that the Bibles from which the readers read were prerevolutionary editions “of the Synodal typography,” “carefully wrapped in cloth or paper to protect the binding.”68 Braun’s impressions after a year of exploring urban Moscow were that Soviet authorities had done much to marginalize religion in daily life, but had done little to diminish religious belief among the populace. He concluded that “the great mass of worshipping Russians never repudiated their religious beliefs. They were simply prevented in effect, by state decree, from being present in their village and city churches.”69 In Braun’s opinion, Russia was “incurably religious.”70
Throughout the winter of 1935–36 and spring 1936 Bishop Neveu suffered from hypertension, high cholesterol, angina, and nephritis. By July 1936 Neveu was too sick to survive another winter in Moscow, so Braun spent that month arranging for Neveu’s exit visa. The bishop left the Soviet Union on 31 July 1936, never to see his beloved parishioners again. In a sense, Neveu’s departure meant that the Catholic Church in the USSR had been decapitated, for he had been the only bishop at freedom in central Russia. Braun was now left alone to serve as acting pastor of the St. Louis des Français Church, a position he held until exiting the Soviet Union in December 1945.

The degree of difficulty facing Braun can be gauged statistically by perusing data on the number of operating churches in the USSR. In 1934 St. Louis des Français Church was one of three operating Catholic churches in Moscow and one of thirty-one in the Soviet Union. By summer 1937 St. Louis des Français was the only operating Catholic church in Moscow, where it served more than twenty thousand Catholics. By late 1938 it was the only operating Catholic church in the entire Russian Socialist Republic. The closing of so many other churches meant that Braun suddenly found himself at the center of Catholic life in a vast realm spanning nearly one-sixth of the globe, yet he lacked the formal authority to ordain new bishops or priests and remained physically at the mercy of those very Soviet institutions responsible for the church closings.

From 1936 to June 1941 some features of Braun’s routine at the St. Louis des Français Church remained the same as earlier. On weekdays he opened the church at seventy thirty to prepare for eight o’clock Mass. As before, attendance was modest. On Sundays he regularly said two masses—a Low Mass with Gospel reading and sermon in English for diplomatic personnel from the U.S. and British embassies, and a High Mass with Gospel and sermon in French for the longtime French inhabitants of Moscow and for Francophone diplomats. At the Easter service in April 1937 Braun followed Neveu’s example, reading a sermon in Russian and delivering the traditional paschal greeting in that language.

In May 1937, however, with the closure of two nearby Catholic churches, Braun’s clerical mission was radically transformed. During preparations for the feast of Corpus Christi in June he heard confessions, mostly from displaced parishioners of the Polish Catholic church, for seven hours over two days “without stopping.” At Mass these same displaced Catholics “flood[ed] St. Louis where we have Communions without number.” For these new parishioners Braun added the regular reading of the Gospel in Russian. He lamented, “That is all I can do. For the moment I give no sermon in Russian.”

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that year, Braun decided to add a sermon in Russian at Sunday High Mass. In his memoirs he claimed, “Sermons were to be heard nowhere else in the entire capital, including the Russian Orthodox churches that were still open.”

We have no copies of these sermons, but we do possess Braun’s short characterization of them: “At all times by the grace of God did I speak freely of the verities of Christian doctrine. At no time did I submit what I had to say to local authorities. To what extent the Soviets approved of my reading the Scriptures or of my delivering sermons, is an entirely different question. Foreigners and nationals alike often expressed surprise not on what I said, but on my daring to say it. To these I simply quoted Saint Paul: ‘The word of God is not fettered’ (2 Timothy 2:9). Soviet disapproval of what I said from the pulpit of that church was made known to me in no uncertain manner.”

Probably in reaction to Braun’s reading the Gospels and sermons in Russian, the Soviet police sent a stenographer to church on Sundays and holy days to “record everything [Braun] said in English, French, or Russian.”

The stenographer’s presence at worship signaled the beginning of intense official pressure on Braun and of intensified surveillance of the church congregation. In May 1937 a French embassy official warned Braun to be “on guard” because “something is being prepared [by the Soviet authorities] against you [J’ai l’impression que l’on prépare quelque chose contre vous là-bas].” The official did not explain what sort of official enterprise might be under “preparation,” but he noted ominously that “a wave of xenophobia had struck Russian administrators”—a hint that, as a foreigner, Braun constituted a special irritant to the “xenophobic” Soviet officials. On 31 July 1937 the scheme against Braun came to light when the Moscow district commissar of cults asked him to surrender the St. Louis Church’s baptismal registers—its so-called metricheskie knigi. Entering the church sanctuary, the commissar requested to see the form used for recording baptisms. When Braun produced a blank form, the commissar asked for the parish baptismal registers, claiming “all other churches in the city have handed over the books. If you do not do likewise, you are exposing yourself to severe penalties.” He told Braun that his office was “interested in the number of baptisms” performed in the church. According to a letter to Bishop Neveu, Braun responded negatively to this request: “‘That does not concern you.’ I explained to him that we attach no civil or juridical value to those records which have purely sacramental character, and, so far as the administration of Sacraments is concerned, the government plays no role since the decree [of January 1918] promulgating the separation of Church and state.” The commissar nevertheless wanted to see the registers; Braun informed him that he would display the registers for the commissar’s inspection on the church premises but would not
surrender their custody. After this encounter, Braun sought the advice of the French ambassador, Robert Coulondre, who agreed that the church registry should not be surrendered. Braun also made an appointment with then U.S. ambassador Joseph Davies, whom he told that “if the Soviets resort to force in obtaining possession of these records, I [am] determined to follow them wherever they [go], even to the point of being jailed.” Like Coulondre, Davies supported Braun’s moral stand, writing a letter to Commissar of Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov on Braun’s behalf. Under scrutiny from the two Western embassies, the Moscow officials who had initiated the demand for the baptismal registers backed down.

Although the immediate danger of his arrest had passed, Braun continued to feel pressure from the Soviet authorities. In September 1937 he wrote Paris, “At the church all is relatively tranquil, except that we are under strict surveillance [nous sommes sévèrement surveillés].” By late 1937/early 1938 the level of surveillance of Braun and other church personnel had intensified. In November 1937 one of Braun’s most trusted parishioners, Mademoiselle Malinovskaia, was arrested and confined in the women’s prison on Novinskii Boulevard. After she died in prison on 15 January 1938, Braun celebrated Mass “for the soul of this martyr.” On 5 March 1938 the police arrested the church sacristan, Albert Ott, then searched his apartment, terrifying his wife in the process.

Two weeks later, in a letter announcing the expulsion from the USSR of Father Michel Florent, Braun declared that he expected his own expulsion to occur soon. In a conversation with Loy Henderson of the American embassy, Braun was told “of the probable eventuality” of that action, although Henderson promised “that he would do everything possible to protect me.”

Throughout this entire period of intensified surveillance, police pressure, and official harassment, Braun struggled to keep the doors of St. Louis des Français open. Annual taxes on the church building and its land came to 377 American dollars—a hefty amount beyond the ability of the parish itself to cover. Electricity rates were exorbitant, being twenty-two times the established rate per kilowatt-hour charged to state enterprises. Moscow Gas and Electrical Supply refused to provide coal or heating fuel to the church, so Braun had to turn to other sources and pay in hard currency. When the church roof needed replacement, the state’s refusal to sell roofing materials to the church forced Braun to choose between paying high rates on the black market and importing material from Finland, again for hard currency.

In principle, the failure to deal with any one of these problems might have led to the church’s closing—for nonpayment of taxes, violation of the local building code, or dealing on the black market. Other churches in central Russia
had been closed on similar pretexts. Braun avoided that fate because he was able to tap a wellspring of support from the two Western embassies, from Assumptionists abroad, and from private donors. In March 1937 the French ambassador paid the church’s taxes out of embassy funds on the grounds that the church was “not only a source of French influence [in the USSR] but ... a powerful source of support for the entire French colony [in Moscow].” At various points both Bullitt and Davies contributed from their own pockets to the church’s maintenance. The French embassy solved the fuel problem by selling Braun some of its own heating oil. The French embassy also facilitated the import of roofing materials from Finland; the costs were met by private donors to the church and by the Assumptionist community. Contingencies that might have led to the church’s closing led instead to nothing more than chronic headaches for its beleaguered pastor.

Much more disheartening to Braun was a series of five robberies of the St. Louis des Français Church which occurred between 6 December 1940 and 15 February 1941, robberies that he attributed to the Soviet political police. The justification of that attribution was circumstantial: since the church lay across the street from the well-guarded Lubianka prison, Braun could not fathom how amateur burglars could have broken into the church without attracting attention from nearby NKVD officers, nor could he imagine that common criminals would take the risk of entering a foreign-owned church located so close to Soviet political police headquarters. In any case, he duly reported the first three burglaries to the Moscow militia and notified the French and U.S. embassies of the church’s lost property. The fourth robbery, however, was more serious: on Christmas evening 1940 thieves hacksawed the steel bars of a sanctuary window, entered the church, and stole sacred vessels, including one gold and silver plate and “a beautiful gold pyx of extraordinary design with an Agnus Dei engraved on the cover.” Worst of all, the thieves broke the tabernacle doors and strewn the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. When the distraught Braun reported the burglary and desecration to the militia, they sent investigators to tell him that “no clues could be found” as to the thieves’ identity. To add insult to injury, the Moscow city council sent a delegation to inventory the church’s lost valuables, then presented Braun with a bill for several thousand rubles—the cost of state-owned property for which the church, not the thieves, had assumed civic responsibility in the 1920s.

On 15 February 1941 the church was robbed a fifth time, again at night, but on this occasion the thieves entered by smashing the solid oak-paneled front doors in plain view of Lubianka guards. In Braun’s opinion, there was no doubt that this last robbery had been committed by the police themselves. As before,
the tabernacle doors were sprung and the Sacred Species spread over the altar. Everything that remained of value was hauled away by the thieves or spoiled, including Braun’s vestments for Mass. He concluded, “I felt as though the evildoers were telling me: Here is another sample of what we can do. Why don’t you go home?” As before, Braun notified the militia and the Western embassies of the church’s losses, but this time he also contacted the international press in the person of Henry Cassidy, then chief of the Associated Press in Moscow. Cassidy’s story about the five robberies and two desecrations of the St. Louis Church was carried in newspapers throughout the Western world.

During this stressful period Braun carefully watched for signals that Soviet authorities might terminate their aggressive antireligious campaign, or that they might at least reduce official pressures on believers. In September 1936 Braun, disguised as a Spanish agitator, visited the Moscow headquarters of the League of Militant Godless. There he listened to a guide’s summary of the role of atheistic propaganda in the current five-year plan, and he obtained various books and slides used by League antireligious agitators. Although Braun later expressed amusement that his imposture had fooled his Soviet adversaries, he left alarmed at the League’s implacable hostility toward religion. In a letter to Paris written just after the visit, he begged his Assumptionist superiors “to pray that the Lord will assist us. Instead of the situation clarifying and improving, it becomes more murky and complicated every day.”

In late 1936, when a new version of the Soviet Constitution renewed the promise of early Soviet legislation that Church and state would be strictly separated, Braun investigated the possibility that the new constitutional guarantee might lead to a cessation of the antireligious campaign. In October 1936 he attended a presentation by Justice Commissar N. V. Krylenko on Article 124 of the new charter. Krylenko declared that, under the new constitution, Soviet citizens might baptize their children, marry and bury in the Church, even “bury their potatoes with religious ceremonies if they wish,” without state interference. At the same time, however, Krylenko underlined the legal responsibility of citizens to refrain from religious propaganda of any sort. On this matter, Braun observed, the commissar spoke with “extreme hostility” (mépris), which was “evident in his gestures, his attitude, and tone of voice.” From the presentation Braun “learned nothing new.” A month later Pravda published what purported to be a transcript of Krylenko’s remarks; upon inspection Braun found that “a large portion of what he [Krylenko] had said [in September] did not appear [in the newspaper story].” In sifting the evidence, Braun found no justification to think that the Soviet state had changed its policy toward religion in promulgating the new “Stalin” constitution.
In summer 1937 there came various reports that the Communist Party wanted quickly to put an end to religion in the Soviet Union. On 27 July Braun wrote his superiors in Paris that "a Communist neighbor of a woman believer who lives on good terms with her recently said to her that she should bear in mind the party’s decision to finish off religion at all costs [la décision du parti qui veut à tout prix en finir avec la religion]." That same month, the leader of the League of the Militant Godless, Emel’ian Mikhailovich Yaroslavskii, gave a radio address in which he declared that the party must put an end to "religious obscurantism" in the USSR. Given the atmosphere then prevailing inside the Communist Party, it is unlikely that Yaroslavskii would have spoken so definitively without the approval of Stalin and the Politburo generally.

The Soviet antireligious campaign targeted all confessions, but there were also pressures directed specifically against Soviet Catholics. For example, in September 1937 Braun read an anti-Catholic polemic in Komsomolskaia Pravda attacking "the pope and his ministers" by the "vilest inventions that one can imagine." Braun found the article "disreputable and disgusting." In November 1937 the Leningrad journal Antireligioznik carried a "violent attack on the Jesuits"—an attack that the Dominican Michel Florent somehow felt was directed against him, as a foreign missionary in the city. Braun found nothing in the article explicitly indicting Florent, but he nevertheless wondered "what kind of salad the G.P.U. [sic] is making." In January 1938 the Leningrad authorities’ intentions toward Florent became manifest when the newspaper Smena declared the Dominican a fascist agitator among Leningrad’s youth. The newspaper asserted that "fascism only exists in Leningrad thanks to Catholicism." Within two months, as we noted above, Florent was ordered expelled from the Soviet Union. Here again was superfluous proof that the League of the Militant Godless, the antireligious press, and government organs, including the police, were collaborating in an effort to end religion in the Soviet Union.

As he surveyed the dispiriting political landscape, however, Braun saw one sign of hope: the party’s and government’s antireligious efforts were not generating much popular support. In April 1937 he wrote his Paris superiors that there were "numerous defections in every corner of the country from antireligious organizations." That same month he suggested in a letter to Monsignor Filippo Giobbe in Rome that, despite unrelenting pressure from antireligious organizations, "the reaction of the population in general seems to me more than indifferent." Moreover, Braun now suspected that among the 5 million militant atheists in the USSR there were many religious believers who had been coerced into joining the antireligious movement. For that reason, he predicted that the athe-
istic movement would unravel as soon as state coercion diminished. “Violenta non durant,” he exclaimed.99

From Braun’s perspective, the acid test of the regime’s antireligious policies was the 1937 census, which asked citizens, “Are you a believer or nonbeliever?” Writing in his memoirs, Braun asserted, “Militant atheists expected the record [of the census] to show in black and white that the peoples of Russia had thrown overboard their belief in God along with the religious traditions. The census would officially demonstrate that Communist materialist teachings had finally conquered the remnants of bourgeois doctrines.”100 Recruiting of census takers and technical planning for data collection occupied several months before the census actually occurred, on 6 January 1937, a day coinciding with Orthodox Christmas. During late winter and spring 1937 the census bureaus in various parts of the USSR processed the results. As early as April 1937 the Leningrad central census bureau reported “statistical and political problems” with the census data—a sure sign that the results were not what the party had anticipated.101 That same month Braun heard rumors that the census had gone badly for the government. On 6 April he wrote Bishop Neveu that Pravda had recently published an editorial asserting “a believer is no enemy of the government [veruiushchii ne vrag vlasti].” Apropos that editorial he remarked to Neveu, “There is certainly something unusual, even extraordinary, in that attitude. Is it because the census has given unexpected results on the number of believers just as the ‘Letter from Rome’ predicted, and now Uncle Joseph [Stalin] will begin to sound a retreat [on the religious front]?”102

In his memoirs, Braun reported that (unnamed) Moscow acquaintances in the Central Department of the All-Union Census Office told him that “seventy percent of the population had answered in the affirmative to the question ‘Are you or are you not a believer?’”103 In fact, as a recent post-Soviet study of the 1937 census has shown, Braun’s associates overestimated the number of believers. Actually, 55 million Soviet citizens declared themselves believers on question five of the census, against 42 million who recorded themselves as unbelievers. Thus, of the 97 million citizens who answered the question, roughly 56 percent classified themselves as believers.104

Most significant for our purposes is that, early in April 1937, Braun had concluded that the tide in the antireligious campaign might be turning against militant atheists. On 7 April Braun wrote Monsignor Filippo Giobbe that “personally, I believe that Stalin is allowing a certain liberty to two currents of thought: the first, completely antireligious, unprecedentedly aggressive; the second, in favor of believers, very timid, hesitant and lacking self-assurance. Perhaps before
reacting to these two currents Stalin hopes to see which side will gain momentum, and perhaps he has already taken appropriate, if imperceptible, measures permitting them to exist in order to begin the contest [between them].

In retrospect, it is clear that during the interwar period the party never reduced pressure on the Christian Churches. If Braun was mistaken about the direction of government policy, however, his error was minor. Even when armed with evidence of a reversal to the government in the 1937 census, he recognized that the dominant message from the Soviet apparatus was “completely antireligious, unprecedentedly aggressive.”

IV

In spite of the impression created by the Soviet press that the Nazi-Soviet relationship between September 1939 and June 1941 had been correct, even cordial, and that therefore the 1941 invasion was a great surprise, Braun contended in his memoirs that “there was no difficulty in foreseeing that a hot war was in preparation, all the more so that Soviet fortifications were being hastened in that part of Polish territory evacuated by the Soviets of its civilian population. Armament and munitions factories in the Soviet Union were working as they never had before, although war stocks had been piling up for over twenty years.” Braun claimed to have heard rumors of impending war from two sources: “diplomats belonging to the Axis powers,” who “dropped hints from time to time”; and “parents of displaced Soviet soldiers,” who knew about troop movements occurring within the Soviet Union, “though not a word was appearing in the press.” In view of the high probability of conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union, Braun had written the Vatican in spring 1941 “that come what may, he was “determined with God’s help to remain at my post.” In advance of the Nazi invasion, he managed to secure papal approval for his plan to remain in Moscow in the event of conflict, and he procured a special blessing for his congregants.

On the morning of 22 June 1941 Braun drove to church to prepare for Sunday services. He observed nothing extraordinary in the city “except for speeding cars going to or leaving the Kremlin” and “signs of unusual activity . . . in all the NKVD buildings surrounding the church” itself. Not until noon that day, when Viacheslav Molotov announced on the radio the news of the Nazi invasion, did Braun become aware that the Soviet Union was at war.

The hostilities had immediate effects on Braun and his church. Within a week of the conflict’s outset, the Vichy regime broke diplomatic relations with the USSR. That break in relations, in turn, led to the closure of the French embassy.
where Braun had spent seven years. For three days in late June, the Soviet police
held him incommunicado along with French residents of the compound. Al-
though he was released, the diplomatic personnel who had constituted the back-
bone of the French colony in Moscow and who had often served as his patrons
in confrontations with Soviet authorities were compelled to leave the USSR.108
Their departure now forced Braun to depend on help from the U.S. embassy,
which, under Ambassador Lawrence Steinhardt, proved reluctant to assert itself
on his behalf. Indeed, in July 1941 the ambassador pressured Braun to leave the
USSR along with “nonessential” embassy personnel.109 His refusal provoked the
ambassador to deny Braun help finding a new domicile and securing war rations.
Thus, the war’s outbreak threatened to isolate Braun from the diplomats who
had previously sustained him, placing his church in a precarious position.

In summer and fall 1941 Moscow itself came under air bombardment from
the Luftwaffe, and soon the capital’s remaining population steeled itself to face
a German infantry attack. The St. Louis des Français Church sustained dam-
age during the German air offensive: antiaircraft flack pierced the roof in many
places, and church windows were blown out of their frames by explosions.110
To repair the damaged church, Braun secured surplus lumber via a parishioner’s
husband and covered the window openings with plywood. When the city coun-
cil cut off electricity to the church, Braun removed the reflector from one of his
automobile headlights, hooked it to a makeshift battery, and installed it above
the tabernacle of the main altar. By means of this contraption, he could throw
enough light into the darkened church to see during Mass. To procure food for
himself and indigent parishioners, he fabricated a requisition order for a ton of
potatoes and half a ton of carrots and submitted it to the Mosovprom Kombi-
nat (Moscow Vegetable Supply Bureau). When the “order” was accepted, he ob-
tained enough food to survive the winter of 1941–42 without a ration card.111

Like other residents of the capital, Braun was a witness to the Moscow panic
of 1941. Inside the U.S. embassy there had been considerable apprehension since
midsummer: the ambassador opened his office at Spasso House for a few hours
each day, but left the city in the afternoon for a forest dacha that the German
air force would be less likely to bomb. Most Americans in the capital also took
refuge outside the city.112 Already in July preparations were under way to send
nonessential personnel from the country, and contingency plans were being for-
mulated to remove the embassy from Moscow. On 14 October 1941 the remain-
ing Americans in Moscow were notified by the embassy to evacuate Moscow
for Kuibyshev, where Soviet officials had decided to locate their own operations.
As before, Braun refused to abandon his parish. The ambassador demanded of
Braun a written declaration of that intention and informed him that security
was his own responsibility. The Americans then joined the crush of people from foreign legations and Soviet ministries leaving the capital. In his memoirs Braun reported, “A large section of the city’s population was hoping to be rid of a detested regime. On the one passable road out of Moscow fleeing commissars late in leaving were being mauled to death by infuriated Russians.” Meanwhile, inside the city, residents experienced the onset of a horrific winter, the coldest in a century. Braun recalled, “The cold was so intense . . . that water mains froze and burst in a section where I was living. We had to leave the house to go and get our water in pails.”113

As Braun and his congregants faced the brutal material privations of the first war year, they took encouragement from an unexpected turn in Soviet policy toward religion: the virtual abandonment of aggressive antireligious propaganda. According to Braun, two developments explained the government’s sudden volte-face. First and most important, German forces carried orders requiring them to pay respectful attention to Orthodox churches in occupied Soviet territory: each unit commander read a public proclamation “restoring to the Orthodox Church the plenitude of its rights and privileges,” and promising it “the exclusive protection of the German Reich.” Working with the Russian émigré Church, the Belgrade Synod, the Wehrmacht distributed sacred vessels, vestments, and liturgical books to indigenous Orthodox clergy, and sometimes even escorted émigré priests from central Europe back into Russia. In the first days of occupation, German unit commanders helped organize religious services in conquered cities to “give thanks” for liberating believers from the Soviet yoke. In some places, such as Smolensk, the old cathedral was restored and reopened with festive polyphony. Inside Moscow Braun heard portable radio broadcasts of such ceremonies.114 Plainly, the German tactic was to use religious freedom for the Orthodox as a political instrument to detach the majority of the population from the Soviet regime. According to Braun, the German maneuver had the effect of releasing pent-up religious sentiment among the Russian Orthodox “far beyond the limits of [German] occupied territory.”115

Second, on the very day of the invasion, the Russian Orthodox metropolitan Sergei issued a patriotic call for national unity against the Nazis—a call that, according to Braun, “obtained the respect and attention of great multitudes of Russians,” particularly in the absence of leadership by Stalin, who for two weeks after the Nazi attack did not speak in public.116 By identifying the Soviet Church hierarchy with the defense of Russia, Metropolitan Sergei made it possible for the Soviet government to respond to the Germans’ pro-Orthodox tactics with moves of its own. Initially, the government suspended publication of
Bezbozhnik (Atheist), the newspaper of the League of the Militant Godless. It also closed antireligious museums, then canceled antireligious lectures and films. In 1942, in the pages of the propagandistic book Pravda o religii v Rossii (Truth about Religion in Russia), which was designed to prove that the Orthodox Church needed no “liberation” by the Nazis, the Soviet government printed several pages of prayers in Slavonic, with the name of God appearing in capital letters—the first use of the old orthography since 1918. The Soviet government soon began lamenting the destruction by the Wehrmacht of “our holy shrines,” a lamentation that, according to Braun, was indignantly received by the Russian Orthodox, who were “well aware of this duplicity.” Within unoccupied territory, the government selectively reduced police pressure against religious worship. The culmination of the new tactic toward religion was the restoration of the Moscow patriarchate in September 1943, a step that carried Stalin’s personal sanction.

In Braun’s opinion, the new Soviet approach toward religion did not demonstrate a change of heart by the Communist leadership; rather it was a cynical political maneuver meant to counteract the Germans’ early success in identifying themselves with the Russian Orthodox in the occupation zone. He feared that, as soon as the German threat disappeared, the Soviet regime would resume its old antireligious policies. As he looked behind the scenes of Soviet moves to revive the Moscow patriarchate, for example, he wondered whether Metropolitans Sergei, Alexei, and Nikolai had actually taken the initiative in asking for a meeting with Stalin to arrange the election of a new patriarch in September 1943, or whether they had been summoned to the Kremlin and ordered to do so. In May 1944, when Patriarch Sergei died, the police began to search the rosters of prison camps to find a quorum of responsible clergy to vote for Sergei’s successor; after more than six months’ search, scarcely thirty delegates to the Church council could be mustered and one of these died during the council sessions. In Braun’s opinion, the “revived” Russian Orthodox Church was sustained by the government not out of conviction but out of expediency. His impression was shared by “Russian worshipers” who told him, apropos the Soviet aboutface toward religion: “Vidno teper’, chto im Bog nuzhen” (Now one can see that they [the authorities] need God).

Braun’s intense suspicion of the Communist regime led him to the conclusion that, appearances notwithstanding, “the Soviets were not our allies.” “More than anyone else perhaps among the foreigners, I knew that the Soviets as distinguished from honest-to-goodness Russians, were never our allies, never had been and never will be!”
Western diplomats interpreted that judgment as nonsupport for the war against the Germans, making Braun virtually persona non grata among foreigners in the capital. For example, Braun’s position on the war irritated the Free French, who in April 1942 sent Roger Garreau to serve as their diplomatic liaison in Moscow. From the moment of his arrival in the Soviet capital, Garreau did everything he could to flatter his Soviet hosts, even supporting a Soviet demand to requisition the French embassy compound for a military academy. As a man of the left, Garreau was indifferent to matters of religion and viewed religious questions from the perspective of French political interests; naturally, therefore, he found Braun’s fierce suspicion of the Soviet regime inconvenient, irrational, and repugnant. In 1944, when Garreau asked Braun to permit filming of a Mass and choral singing at St. Louis des Français, he was appalled that Braun rejected the proposal. But Braun felt he could do no other: “It was simply revolting after ten years of the progressive extermination of Catholicism to be forced now to show it hypocritically in a false light.”

American diplomats were also unhappy with Braun’s attitude toward the Soviet regime. According to Braun’s memoirs, “An unbelievable warped psychosis among some fellow countrymen in Moscow continually associated me with anti-Soviet (meaning anti-Russian) convictions. . . . I was just simply down on the record as opposing the war efforts. I suffered much on that score, though the accusation was completely untrue.”

For Braun the clearest proof of this disdain was a meeting in early 1945 at the U.S. embassy with a presidential aide, Mr. Edward J. Flynn, just returned from the Yalta Conference. After telling Braun that, at Yalta, Stalin had asked Roosevelt to recall him to the United States and that Roosevelt had rebuffed the request, Flynn asked Braun to report on the religious situation inside the Soviet Union. In Braun’s opinion, the visitor, who had previously consulted with Soviet and Russian Orthodox Church officials, was not willing to entertain an unfavorable assessment. Braun’s account of the conversation, which remains unpublished, deserves to be quoted in extenso:

As briefly as possible I explained the Kremlin’s fantastic about-face and the slow but cunningly calculated neoreligious policy then being developed. I insisted on the sad fact that religion in general and Orthodoxy in particular had been in a long phase of agony at the time of the Wehrmacht invasion. I emphasized that the Church and worshipers had had a sovereign and crying need of liberation from religious oppression at the beginning of World War II in Russia.
It was the absolute contrary to what the visitor had been hearing from the mouths of suddenly freed and highly influenced spokesmen of all faiths, barring the Catholic, with whom he had spoken. What I had to say proved displeasing to my listener. How could I be right when I was alone saying these things? I was given the impression that the White House-designated traveler did not want to hear the truth. He was quite unhappy at seeing me destroy the wonderful impression he had acquired and was prepared to take home.

Questioned on the status of Catholicism, it was my painful duty to inform him of its quasi-total material annihilation. Three large dioceses had been completely disrupted. There was not a single Catholic bishop, nor one single priest left, and no seminary to train the clergy operating in all of Russia, properly speaking!

Following the disheartening but true picture I was not a little surprised to be asked: “What are you complaining about? Isn’t your church operating?” The fact that the St. Louis Church of Moscow was the one and only remnant of 1500 other Catholic churches of the Latin rite alone left open in the entire country appeared not to impress him at all. On his return he could report that Catholicism in the Soviet Union was operating. The statement would essentially be true and carry weight because it would be coming from a returning on-the-spot eyewitness. It would be a statement similar to that made by Lozovskii at the time of the Beaverbrook-Harriman Lend-Lease mission of late September 1941.125

Among diplomats posted to Moscow, only representatives of the Polish government-in-exile cultivated Braun and warmly supported the St. Louis Church. In summer 1941 the Soviet government released from the Lubianka prison General Władysław Anders, whom the Polish exile government in London quickly named commander of the then nonexistent Polish army. Anders was instructed by his government to form a Polish army of seven divisions on Soviet soil from ethnic Poles who had fled the Nazis, been deported from occupied eastern Poland by Soviet authorities, and/or been imprisoned by the Soviets before the Nazi invasion. By the Polish government’s calculations, with Soviet cooperation Anders would be able to organize a force of roughly 300,000 troops. In early September the London government-in-exile sent to Moscow its ambassador, Stanislaw Kot, to help Anders gain the release of Polish officers from Soviet prisons and to negotiate agreements that would place the reconstituted Polish army in the field against the Nazis.
On 9 September 1941, at a meeting of the Polish-Soviet commission on deportees, the Soviets asserted that only 300,000–350,000 ethnic Poles were living in the USSR; Polish estimates had put the total well over a million. Soviet military authorities would concede the availability of only 21,000 Polish fighting men, and a thousand officers. For Anders and Kot, the crucial question quickly became the location of the more than 15,000 Polish officers who had been interned after September 1939 in Soviet camps at Kozelsk, Storobelsk, and Ostashkov. Although the Poles doggedly pressed the Soviet government to disclose the whereabouts of these officers, they met with nothing but lies and stonewalling. On 13 April 1943 German radio announced that the Polish officers’ bodies had been found in mass graves in the Katyn forest; forensic evidence showed that they had all been killed by single gunshots to the head—a modus operandi consistent with NKVD execution squads.

From the time of his release from Lubianka Anders and a dozen officers came to church at St. Louis des Français. “In the number,” Braun reported, “figured a non-Catholic officer so happy at being released from the NKVD inferno, that for 1 1/2 hours all through the service he lay stretched out and face down in the central aisle in front of the sanctuary. With his arms extended in the form of a cross, he remained motionless in an act of thanksgiving to God. Beginning with General Anders, this released military [man] and all the other members of his staff had been severely manhandled, rubber-hosed and otherwise maltreated during weeks and weeks of questioning at the hands of their captors.” When Kot arrived in Moscow, he confided to Braun details of his search for the missing Polish officers, including the “explanations” by Stalin, Molotov, and Antonov as to why the officers had not been located. Having become friendly with Ambassador Kot and sympathetic to the goals of the Polish investigation, Braun followed the story even after the April 1943 announcement by the Germans that the graves of the massacred officers had been found. He interviewed American journalists who in 1943 had visited Katyn forest at the Soviet government’s invitation to witness the falsehood of the Nazi accusation. According to Braun, “Many of these newsmen said privately that not a single one of their group was convinced of what the Soviets were attempting to prove—German guilt.” In his memoirs, Braun called the Katyn forest massacre an act of “Soviet genocide” against the Poles. Meanwhile, after April 1943 his private insistence that official U.S. solidarity with the USSR over the Katyn affair was a product of American “war psychosis” did nothing to endear him to American diplomatic personnel in the Soviet Union or at home. It further marked him as an enemy of Soviet power, to be removed at the earliest opportunity.
The pretext for Braun’s removal was an October 1944 altercation between him and a Soviet caretaker at the French embassy, where Braun had again taken up residence. In the last years of the war Braun was not a healthy man, physically or psychologically. He had contracted chronic bronchitis, a condition to which he remained susceptible until the end of his life. He suffered from hypertension and, his nerves stretched taut, was prone to fits of temper. In October 1944 his temper snapped after he caught the caretaker, N. A. Kniazev, stealing firewood reserved for heating the homes of sick Russian peasants to whom Braun ministered in the Moscow suburbs. Incensed over this pilferage, Braun had raised his fist and threatened to strike the thief.

A result of this encounter was Kniazev’s decision, on 2 November 1944, to file a lawsuit charging Braun with assault and battery. According to the court allegation, the priest “threw himself upon me [Kniazev] like a beast flailing his arms. Gnashing his teeth, he [Braun] struck me on the nose and wanted to strike me again, but I seized his arm.” Braun was mystified by this charge. He did not deny raising his fist and warning Kniazev not to touch the specially designated firewood, but he firmly denied striking the caretaker. When the case came to trial in June 1945, Braun told the Soviet court that the caretaker’s charge of assault and battery was “outrageous and utterly defamatory.” He accused Kniazev of “provocation” and being “habitually in a state of inebriety.” Braun suspected, with good reason, that Kniazev was an NKVD dupe who had filed the lawsuit in order to discredit Braun and provoke his withdrawal from Moscow. Braun was irritated that neither Mr. Garreau of the Free French legation nor employees of the U.S. embassy helped with his defense in court. At trial Braun was found guilty and fined one hundred rubles; on appeal in late August 1945, however, Braun was vindicated. The plaintiff withdrew the charges, citing coercion by the police as the main reason he had filed them in the first place.

In spite of his formal legal victory, Braun’s reputation had suffered irreparable harm. The U.S. embassy, under whose auspices he had operated in Moscow, was eager to have him replaced. Moreover, Braun’s Assumptionist superiors, long worried about his health, decided in the wake of the assault case to summon him home from Moscow.

The circumstances surrounding his removal made Braun’s last months in Moscow a melancholy time. As Soviet war survivors celebrated their country’s success in defeating National Socialism, Braun sadly contemplated what he felt to be a nearly complete Soviet triumph in obliterating Latin-rite Catholicism in Russia. He still took no comfort in the unquestionably freer religious climate that had obtained in Moscow after the Soviet government dropped, for reasons
of expediency, its overtly antireligious policies. His own recent experience illus-
trated only too clearly that any priest or layperson inconvenient to Soviet au-
thorities could be removed from sacred ministry, and that the removal could be
done with the acquiescence of Church officials and with the full knowledge of
Western embassies. Feeling utterly alone and betrayed, he was worried that the
Soviet police would have him killed as he left the country.135 He did not fret for
his own life, which he had long been ready to sacrifice for the Church’s sake: his
fear was that he would not live to tell the story of his ministry and parishioners.

V

When Braun returned to the United States on 29 December 1945, he was
exhausted, overwrought, and possibly suffering from paranoia.136 His religious
superiors ordered him to rest, sending him on journeys to Colombia and Cuba
where his damaged lungs and nerves might mend.137

At some point in the first eighteen months after his return to the United
States, Braun decided to write memoirs describing his Moscow mission. In the
Assumptionist Archives in Boston, Massachusetts, there are three versions of
these memoirs. The first variant, dated 1948, consists of ten chapters in roughly
two hundred typed pages. Although the text is incomplete—he apparently in-
tended to add “two or three more chapters” to it—Braun sent the manuscript to
William C. Bullitt for an appraisal.138 Archival evidence suggests that Braun
hoped for a book contract on the basis of this manuscript.139 The second variant,
dated 1953, consists of sixteen chapters and is over three hundred pages long.
This variant is also incomplete. A note, dated 24 April 1953, lists four other chap-
ters as “completed, not yet typed,” and promises “five or six more unwritten
chapters . . . ending with my exit from the USSR in 1945,” plus an “epilogue on
the Kremlin’s vain grab at Spain [in the Spanish civil war].”140 Braun planned
to publish this variant upon its completion, providing he could secure approval
from his religious superiors.141 The third variant, dated 1961, is a complete text
consisting of thirty-four chapters in 477 pages, plus eight appendices. This vari-
ant circulated among Braun’s religious superiors in the Assumptionist order, and
six chapters were sent to the Regnery Press in Chicago for evaluation.142 None
of these manuscripts was ever published, in spite of Braun’s unwavering deter-
mination to see his memoirs into print.

How can we account for the collapse of his publication plans? Two explana-
tions present themselves, the first having to do with the nature of his memoirs,
and the second connected to the attitude of his religious superiors.
The first and second variants of Braun’s memoirs awkwardly combined a narrative of his priestly activity in the Soviet Union and anti-Communist polemics. Recounting his twelve years in Moscow, Braun touched on all the key elements of and circumstances surrounding his ministry: his relationship to the American and French embassies; his relationship to Bishop Neveu; the difficulties of contending against Soviet antireligious propaganda; the Communist Party’s campaign in the 1930s to destroy religious monuments, to close important churches, and to harass, intimidate, or arrest clergymen; the receptiveness of common Russia people to religion and their efforts to maintain religious customs in the face of state persecution; the partial revival of religion during the Second World War as Soviet authorities tried to enlist nationalist sentiments, including religious feeling, against the Nazis. All these matters Braun treated clearly and authoritatively. In describing Soviet antireligious policy, he quoted from official materials but took care to illustrate how party initiatives played out in Moscow streets and apartments. Braun was duly reticent in his comments on Russian religiosity: to protect innocent believers, he did not give names or places where he anointed the sick or said funeral masses for the dead, nor did he disclose the names or public locations where he witnessed common people reading Scripture or discussing religious matters. Braun was also virtually silent about his own confidential correspondence with Assumptionist superiors in Paris and Rome. Despite his strategic silences, he produced an informative, sometimes moving narrative of a simple priest facing the extreme. On the other hand, Braun’s narrative not infrequently gave way to exasperated polemic against the Soviet system and against those Westerners who, in his view, had deliberately repeated Soviet propaganda or had done nothing to expose the “sham” of the Communist system. Among the targets of his criticism were: the dean of Canterbury Cathedral, Dr. Hewlett Johnson, whom Braun accused of misleading Western public opinion concerning the condition of religion in Russia; leading American Communists, “plus the sympathizers, pinks and fellow travelers,” who, Braun said, were “abusing the Bill of Rights and actually preaching and propagating Lenin’s conception and doctrine of proletarian democracy”; the American photographer Margaret Bourke-White whose book *Russia at War Seen Through a Camera* suggested that wartime Russia permitted freedom of religion; Ambassador Davies, whose book *Mission to Moscow* exaggerated the strength of the Soviet economic system; unnamed commercial attachés and “every single investigating commission coming to the USSR,” all of whom Braun thought “may live for years in the Soviet Union without ever becoming acquainted with these intimate [economic] conditions”; the U.S. Office of War Information, which, Braun declared, “greatly contributed to the spreading
of plain Bolshevism under color of mutual cooperation for military ends”; and Western scientists and scholars sympathetic to the Soviet Union. Of these last, Braun argued that the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) had identified countless “reds, pinks, sympathizers and fellow travelers” across the West.\(^{148}\) Braun was alarmed by what he perceived to be the deep penetration of Communists and Communist sympathizers into Western institutions, and he was furious over “as many as five thousand Bolshevik agitators neatly disguised as attachés, buyers, engineers, student techni-
cians, etc., etc.,” who had been admitted into the United States under diplomatic auspices.\(^{149}\)

Braun became so carried away in his critique of the Soviet system and its American “sympathizers” that he described his book as a clarion call to his countrymen:

After deifying the Soviets in the stampede frenzy and political bliss of 1941–45, the United States must now face some very illuminating reality. Unadorned truth is all that is necessary for a nation such as ours to become realistic to the point of enlightened awareness and preparedness. This book has no other point than that of showing to what a lamentable extent Soviet deceit has abused the goodwill of the American nation. Our free democracy is threatened from within our own shores. Let us keep it free and not be found wanting in the hour of need.\(^{150}\)

Above all, Braun wanted Americans to understand that, at the heart of Soviet Communism, there was no large vision of social equality but the squalid reality of a police state. In the last chapter of his 1948 memoir he described the political police as “the machine which keeps [the Soviet Union] in existence and in motion,”\(^{151}\) as “the pivot and keystone of Bolshevism.”\(^{152}\) If, for Plautus, human relations could be reduced to the formula \(\text{homo homini lupus}\), then, for Braun, human relations under Soviet power functioned under the rule \(\text{Sovieticus homini lupissimus}\).\(^{153}\)

In the 1953 variant of Braun’s memoirs there was a similar tension between narrative of priestly ministry and anti-Communist rhetoric. As in the preceding version, Braun emphasized exposé over memorializing his own experience. Three of the six “possible titles” he listed for the 1953 manuscript illustrated that emphasis: “Bolshevism Confidential,” “Communism Without Concealment,” and “Barefaced Bolshevism.” A fourth possible title, “Twelve Rounds with the Kremlin,” conveys Braun’s militant anti-Communism as well as his hypertro-
phied self-image: the solitary pugilist in a prizefight against an unscrupulous, overwhelmingly strong opponent.\textsuperscript{154}

To be sure, the intrusion of an assertive anti-Communism into memoirs describing the unfortunate plight of religious believers in the Soviet Union had its logical justifications: the American reading public would have been curious about Braun's experiences in Moscow not despite but because of his first-hand witness to Soviet religious persecution; moreover, a memoirist may do dis-service to his or her readers by masking personal political convictions;\textsuperscript{155} besides, it made sense for a priest who had witnessed the damage done by Soviet antireligious policy to speak out against the Communist system. The literary problem Braun faced, therefore, had less to do with his deeply held anti-Communist convictions than with the memoirs' focus: strident anti-Communist rhetoric distracted attention from the human religious drama that constituted the chief interest of his twelve years in Moscow.

The 1961 variant of his memoirs was far more successful than the two preceding versions. Like them, the 1961 manuscript dealt with the main elements and circumstances surrounding his ministry, but unlike them, it was far more detailed in treating the war years. Braun managed to give the reader a clearer sense of his own isolation in the war-torn capital, to convey how Soviet policy toward religion evolved between 1941 and 1943, and to suggest how the behavior of Christians in Russia changed under the stresses of war. He also discussed with remarkable frankness his troubled relationships with French and American diplomats during the war insofar as those relationships bore on his ministry. He even alluded to misunderstandings with his American religious superior, Father Crescent Armanet, over his ministry in 1941 and 1945. Besides adding candid material on the war years, Braun introduced new anecdotal material on his pre-war ministry, on believers' attitudes toward Soviet power, and on the Communist Party's campaign against religion before 1941. The effect was to give readers a more nuanced, more detailed, and humane view of believers' plights under Soviet rule and to provide a clearer sense of Braun's own role in attending the diminishing flock of Russian Catholics.

In the 1961 manuscript Braun did not hide his anti-Communism, but he softened his rhetoric on political issues. He removed some of the anti-Communist epithets that had punctuated earlier versions of the memoirs: references to “sympathizers, pinks and fellow travelers . . . abusing the Bill of Rights” were excised, for example. He no longer characterized his book's purpose as providing an “enlightened awareness” of “Soviet deceit.” He was now more selective in personal criticisms; for example, the attack on the Anglican dean Dr. Hewlett
Johnson was dropped. Where Braun chose to criticize prominent diplomats, he did so indirectly or without mentioning their names. Thus, when describing his unfortunate dealings with the American ambassador in 1941, Laurence Steinhardt, and the ambassadorial delegate of the Free French in 1943–44, Roger Garreau, Braun never cited the offending diplomats’ names. Augmenting his memories of Russia’s religious situation and softening his anti-Communist rhetoric enabled Braun to produce in the 1961 manuscript a literary document far more empathetic than preceding versions of the memoirs.

Yet the 1961 memoirs remained potentially controversial in a number of respects. Braun contended that senior American diplomats in Moscow were ignorant of Soviet hostility toward religion during the prewar years. He hinted that in late 1938 the U.S. ambassador, Joseph Davies, had never read the Roosevelt-Litvinov agreements, and he accused Ambassador Steinhardt in 1941 of trying to engineer his recall. Braun also suggested that President Roosevelt’s personal envoy, visiting the Moscow embassy in 1945 after the Yalta Conference, “did not want to hear the truth” about Soviet religious oppression before 1941. Braun was also outspoken in criticizing the American media for misrepresenting the religious problem in the Soviet Union. He described the credulous Western press reception of a 1942 book issued by the Moscow patriarchate as an instance of “gullibility, incompetence or perhaps . . . of that inexplicable war psychosis” that led to “collaboration with deceit.” And he repeated his earlier critical comments about the photographer Margaret Bourke-White, whose book Shooting the Russian War gave, in his opinion, an offensively false view of religion at the outset of the Nazi invasion. To these historical criticisms Braun added contemporary observations about Soviet antireligious policies. He described Khrushchev’s relative tolerance toward religion as “a provisional policy of patience” masking the “irreligion and antireligious campaigns [that] are organic articles of [Communism’s] deceptive doctrine.” He insisted that under Khrushchev the political police remained “the principal pillar of the [Communist] regime,” an “army all by itself.”

These contemporary references might be taken as attempts to connect Braun’s memoirs with current political realities, but they also opened Braun to the criticism that he had not yet placed his anti-Communism under control. He could be faulted by informed specialists who regarded Khrushchev’s internal policies as an experiment in reforming Communism or in de-Stalinization. Evidence for the view that Soviet policy was moving away from Stalinist Communism had first accumulated in the Twentieth Party Congress of 1956, when Khrushchev delivered his “secret speech” denouncing the “excesses” and “crimes” of the Stalin terror. In 1961, at the Twenty-second Party Congress, Khrushchev had broad-
ened his earlier critique of Stalin, with the consequence that Stalin’s body was removed from Lenin’s Mausoleum in Red Square. Thus, the very consistency of Braun’s anti-Communism worked against publication of his memoirs in 1961 when so much in the Communist world seemed to be changing. In the publishing world timing is everything.

Of course, no book is without flaws, and so we cannot assume that the chiliastic anti-Communism of the 1948 and 1953 variants or the controversial remarks of the 1961 version would necessarily have precluded publication of Braun’s memoirs. In the hands of a shrewd editor, the manuscripts’ weaknesses might have been minimized and the intrinsic interest of his narrative brought into sharper relief. Still, neither the 1948 or the 1953 version of the memoirs was ever completed. Moreover, we have indirect evidence that former ambassador Bullitt strongly discouraged Braun from attempting to publish the 1948 manuscript without significant revisions. The Assumptionist Archives in Boston hold a memorandum, dated December 1948, in the hand of Father Wilfred Dufault, in which Dufault recorded Bullitt’s opinion: “Unfortunately, his [Braun’s] memoirs, of which the A[postolic] D[elegate] will probably permit publication of parts under cover of anonymity, are badly prepared [sont mal rédigées] in the judgment of Mr. Bullitt. It will have to be entirely rewritten. And I do not believe that Father B[raun] will manage to do this himself unless somebody can be found to put it in shape, to edit. And I doubt that he will spend considerable time boring himself fixing the manuscript given the discouraging prospect that it will perhaps never see publication.”

By the time Braun finished his memoirs in 1961, he had corrected many of the editorial problems of the earlier edition. Still, as we have seen, the manuscript remained without a publisher.

To the inherent flaws of Braun’s memoirs we must add a second factor inhibiting publication: the negative disposition of his religious superiors in the Assumptionist order and in the Vatican. It goes without saying that neither the Assumptionists nor the Vatican harbored any sympathy for the Soviet system or for Communism as a doctrine. Since 1917 the Assumptionist mission in the East had been a struggle to keep Latin Catholicism alive in the face of Soviet persecution. As for the Church as a whole, Pope Pius XI’s 1937 encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* had classified “bolshevistic and atheistic communism” as an “imminent danger . . . which aims at upsetting the social order and at undermining the very foundations of Christian civilization.” Therefore, since Braun’s superiors shared his opposition to Communism, the reasons for their reluctance to see his memoirs published must be sought elsewhere. Documents in the Assumptionist Archives in Boston point to two grounds for this reluctance: a prudential calculation that Braun’s publication might compromise the ongoing Assumptionist mission.
to Russia; and a fear that Braun’s erratic personality and political dogmatism might embarrass the Assumptionist order.

The decision to limit Braun’s right to publish did not emerge immediately. Braun spent most of 1946 on enforced sabbatical for health reasons. In 1947 he dedicated himself, with the permission of his immediate superior Father Wilfrid Dufault, to gathering materials for articles and projected memoirs having to do with the Soviet Union.\(^{164}\) In connection with these projects, in summer 1947 Braun visited Rome, where he consulted documents concerning his tenure in Moscow and discussed the possibility of publishing his findings with Monsignor Domenico Tardini in the Vatican secretariat of state. Apparently, Tardini instructed Braun “to devote his time to writing short articles about the USSR”; however, Tardini declined to put this instruction into writing. He promised to convey this decision to Braun’s immediate religious superiors “in tempore opportuno.”\(^{165}\) Braun interpreted Tardini’s statement as a green light “to prepare his memoirs for publication.”\(^{166}\) The Assumptionist provincial, Father Dufault, sought to clarify whether the Holy See had sanctioned the publication of articles and/or memoirs by Braun. Accordingly, he wrote the apostolic delegate in Washington, Father Amleto Giovanni Cicognani a letter recounting Braun’s conversation with Tardini. Meanwhile, Dufault left Braun “free to prepare the above-mentioned articles, which are expected to appear first separately, then in book form.” However, Dufault worried that publication by Braun might derail the visa application of Father Louis Dion, who was then awaiting approval from the Soviet government to enter Russia as the new pastor of the St. Louis des Français Church and American embassy chaplain. “In order not to jeopardize the business of securing Father Dion’s visa,” Dufault wrote, “I asked him [Braun] not to publish anything nor to speak publicly, despite insistent invitations, until the visa is obtained.”\(^{167}\)

Dufault’s decision was meant to be a short-term measure, but, in retrospect, it was the first step toward a policy linking Braun’s publication plans with the security of the Assumptionist mission in Moscow and of Catholics generally in Eastern Europe. On 10 October 1947 Apostolic Delegate Cicognani wrote that Braun might continue to prepare material on the religious situation in Russia “so that this material will be ready for use at the opportune moment.” Meanwhile, Cicognani stated, “the position of the priests in Moscow and the necessity of the continuation of their apostolate demand that Father Braun’s findings are not made public at the present time.”\(^{168}\) In December 1947 Cicognani received clarification from Monsignor Tardini in the Vatican secretariat on the policy to be followed with respect to Braun. Tardini acknowledged that “it would be very useful to permit Father Braun to draw upon his vast experi-
ence and wide knowledge to expose truthfully and justly what he knows of the situation in Russia.” On the other hand, Tardini declared, the presence of two Assumptionist priests in Moscow, Fathers George Laberge and Jean de Matha Thomas, “must not be forgotten . . . and it is necessary that their apostolate be neither interrupted nor impeded in any way. This situation demands that Father Braun’s findings are not made public at the present time.” At a personal interview with Father Dufault on 15 December 1947, Cicognani justified Tardini’s decision as follows: while acknowledging that Braun “rendered important services to the Church in the USSR” and that “the history he writes will have value sometime,” the Vatican felt that Braun “must be silent since sixty million Catholics find themselves under Soviet domination.” Cicognani offered to write Dufault “a letter to support me with Fr. Braun,” but he asked Dufault “not to show [the] letter to Fr. Braun.” Cicognani’s determination to silence Braun for the sake not just of the Assumptionist mission but also for that of 60 million Catholics under Soviet domination reflected a tactical shift in Vatican policy. As we know from the 1937 Soviet census, there were fewer than a half million Catholics under Soviet control. Even the addition of the Baltic republics and west Ukraine to Soviet territory could not have increased the number of Catholics in the USSR much beyond 5 million. Cicognani’s reference to the 60 million Catholics encompassed the entire population of the Soviet bloc. He was telling Dufault that the Vatican did not want an American priest authoritatively criticizing the Soviet treatment of Catholics in Russia because those criticisms might be counterproductive across Eastern Europe.

In July 1948 Braun continued to hope that the Vatican might permit publication of his memoirs. He wrote a pointed letter to Dufault challenging the silencing:

I will content myself to say simply that a prolonged silence will do nothing but favor the triumph of falsehood and universal deception. I am becoming convinced that heretofore the hesitation has been inspired purely by prudential considerations [motifs sains et sage prudence]. Just as there is a Munich policy of sad memory, so now there is a [Munich policy] of religious character. Personally, I find it exceptionally painful to collaborate in stifling the truth. . . . It goes without saying that to the degree humanly possible as a religious, I will submit without contesting the decisions made by you and the superiors. I humbly pray only that you take into account that I have suffered grievously for a ministry to which I have already consecrated a large part of my religious life under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.”
For his part, Dufault raised again Braun’s “problem” with the Vatican. On 2 August 1948, Dufault reported the results of his conversations with the authorities:

The formal orders [against publication] are still in force for the moment; Rome surely recognizes the advantage of copyrighting [a publication], but Rome undoubtedly considers that, at the moment, one must leave the burden of useful revelations to the laity in order to avoid reprisals [from the Soviets] (I have just heard of another recent case) so grave as to outweigh the good [of publication]. . . . If there is an analogy with Munich, it seems to me you are in no position to judge prudently, because you lack the proper perspective. However strong may be your impressions in this matter, it remains your duty manifestly to obey. We believe firmly that this obedience is the only thing truly profitable for you. In obedience we find victory. I know you know this as well as I do; you will permit me to repeat it, because one needs to repeat it and hear it in difficult times. In this way we strengthen one another.172

Early in fall 1948 Dufault raised yet again the question of Braun’s permission to publish, this time in conversation with the apostolic delegate, Cicognani, and the Assumptionist superior general, Gervais Quénard. We have two accounts of this meeting in the hand of Father Dufault: the first, dated 8 October, gives a terse summary of the meeting; the second, dated December 1948, provides a fuller version. According to the first account, Cicognani “seemed to consider it acceptable for Fr. Braun to publish some writings now—at least anonymously, perhaps even with signature.” But having made that concession in principle, Cicognani, “appearing hesitant, . . . added that it would be better to consult the Vatican Secretariat of State.”173 According to the second account, Cicognani “appeared to permit” Braun the following: “no book, but separate anonymous articles [under the pseudonym] ‘A priest who has spent a long time in Russia’ to be determined by me; in a delicate case, I [Dufault] will refer the matter to Father General.”174 After the meeting, on 25 October, Dufault wrote Cicognani requesting that “Braun be permitted to speak on the problem of religion in Russia provided there will be no publicity.” Dufault also asked for written confirmation that Braun’s memoirs might be published “anonymously” in “independent chapters.” To this letter from Dufault, the apostolic delegate responded by repeating his earlier verdict: “that nothing will be published without consulting [the Vatican] Secretariat of State.”175 Cicognani also refrained from giving Braun written permission to speak in public. Dufault’s impression was
nevertheless that “to Monsignor [Cicognani] and Father General [Quénard] it would seem convenient that Fr. B[raun] be authorized to speak to groups here on condition there be no publicity.”

In December 1948 Father Dufault met with Braun to convey the wishes of the Vatican. The meeting was apparently stormy. To the Vatican’s request that he “keep silent” (se taire), Braun made it clear that “he could never understand nor accept that line of conduct. He told me . . . he deplores what are perhaps certain illusions or errors in the tactics of the Holy See.” Braun told Dufault that he had been obedient to Dufault’s directive not to accept public speaking engagements, but he admitted being overwhelmed by the number of requests to do so, and being frustrated at having to turn them down. According to Dufault, “It seems to him [Braun] that he is the only person who knows certain things, that it would be very interesting and useful to reveal them. He does not (despite my insistence and that of the Apostolic Delegate) understand that the interests of the Holy See and of persons exposed to Soviet persecution render silence preferable for him, given that the laity is more and more opening the public’s eyes concerning the Soviets.”

Saddened by the Vatican’s line, Braun asked Dufault for another meeting. On 17 December Braun requested a “foreign assignment” (poste au loin), perhaps in China, that might allow him to return to Russia one day. Braun confessed that he “had not managed to habituate himself to life here,” because this life “lacks regularity . . . and breeds hypocrisy.” Dufault said curtly, “It is not this life but you that must change.”

After this second exchange of views, Dufault sought the advice of Father Henri Moquin, who told Dufault that the Assumptionists “have made a mistake: in allowing Fr. B[raun] to pursue his desires and plans of anticommunist propaganda, in the hope that he will gradually lose his fervor [se tempérerait] and acquire a taste for a new apostolate. We have, on the contrary, allowed his illusions to persist and perhaps have added to his nervous disorder (a product of long tenure in Moscow), so that he now threatens to become intractable.”

By late December 1948 Father Dufault found himself completely perplexed by Braun. The priest stubbornly desired “to do work [write memoirs] that cannot be authorized.” Braun was the victim of a mental disorder: in Dufault’s words, “His nerves betray him and he has an irascible character.” Yet Braun, as a religious, had a duty to submit to the dictates of the order and the Holy See: “despite certain acts of religious submission that are generous, humble, and meritorious, he [Braun] cannot be considered a religious perfectly submissive and making obedience his first priority.” As if to himself, Dufault concluded, “It is not always easy, but this [obedience] will be to his own good.”
In spring 1949 Dufault sought the advice of a layperson, the international lawyer Michael Francis Doyle, on the Braun affair. Dufault asked not about the publication of memoirs, a matter that for the time being had been clearly resolved by the Vatican, but about Braun’s speaking engagements. The question was whether Braun’s comments on Soviet persecution of religion might prove counterproductive to the Church’s interest in the Soviet Union. As a lawyer, Doyle noted the Soviet obligation under the Roosevelt-Litvinov agreements to grant visas to American embassy chaplains, and he asserted that the U.S. government could compel the Soviets to abide by the agreements if it so chose. However, neither Doyle nor Dufault was confident that the Americans would in fact enforce the agreements’ provisions. Dufault also wondered “if the advantage of Fr. B[raun]’s talks outweighs the danger that the Sov[jets] will be prodded to more nastiness without giving that as a reason.” He was worried about “possible harm to the faithful + to the [St. Louis des Français] church (which might be closed).”

Following this discussion, Dufault met Father Braun on 5 May 1949. At this meeting Dufault implored Braun to reduce speaking engagements and to put his energies into “a parallel activity like recruiting or vocation talks that would give him nerve-relief and better perspective.” Braun had none of it. According to Dufault, “He is still tense. He again blew up more or less about being ‘muzzled.’” In response, Dufault “repeated [the] reasons for whatever muzzling there is, pointing out that he already talks plenty.” Apparently in this meeting, Braun grew so angry with Dufault that he broke a glass table with his fist. In Dufault’s recollection, immediately after breaking the table, “the poor man [Braun] knelt down and begged for my forgiveness.” Fortunately, Braun “departed in better spirits, with a word of apology.”

For Dufault “the first and last question” remained the attitude of the Holy See toward Braun’s activities. Did the Vatican “tolerate” Braun’s “private” speeches or “do they leave the matter entirely to us?” As to Braun’s writing, Dufault felt that neither the apostolic delegate nor Monsignor Tardini in the Vatican secretariat wanted to place an outright prohibition on (anonymous) publications, yet both figures had “stated clearly that it would be better use [of] Fr. B[raun] to engage in other work—for example, teaching.” Dufault asked himself, “Does the H[oly] S[ee]’s reluctance to intervene indicate willingness for us to adjust to the changing situation (e.g., the greater firmness of the Holy Father in recent months in denouncing Red crimes)?” Dufault thought the attitude of the Vatican crucial because of “the difficulty of stopping Fr. Braun when he constantly receives such high encouragement [and] praise.... It seems to me that in order to feel obligated to stop him, we must have evidence of such from the Holy See or some similar grave reason.”
The “problem” of Father Braun now demanded another, final effort at resolution. Father Dufault therefore arranged a kind of summit conference between the leaders of the American branch of the Assumptionists (himself, Father Crescent Armanet, Father Henri Moquin) and the apostolic delegate. At this meeting, Cicognani instructed the Assumptionists that Monsignor Tardini, “having at first encouraged Father Léopold to publish articles, etc., then after considering the possible consequences, changed his advice and since has consistently told the delegate that Braun must neither write (that is, publish) nor speak.” The delegate himself took a softer line: he would authorize Braun to speak but on a sharply reduced schedule. Dufault promised to seek Braun’s consent to this proposal.185

In a letter on 7 September 1949, Father Dufault laid out to Father Braun the history of his discussions with high Church authorities concerning Braun’s publishing and speaking on the Soviet Union. Dufault began by reminding Braun that “your superiors’ known intentions alone infallibly convey God’s desires, even when you feel that some superiors are insufficiently aware of the dangers besetting our civilization and faith and of the greater part you could play in revealing these dangers.” Dufault noted that the Holy See had never given Braun a positive “mandate” to publish and speak. Now, at the meeting of 18 August, the apostolic delegate had finally made an “explicit statement” to the effect that “you refrain from publishing, writing, and giving public talks.” Dufault assured Braun that the Holy See did not “lack courage in the face of the enemy.” Instead the Vatican was concerned not to compromise the Assumptionists’ Moscow mission:

We are agreed that the Soviets, if they are ever to fulfill their pledge and respect our rights in regard to the Moscow mission, will do so only in the face of substantiated threats of reprisals, or through an exchange of “favors.” Even were our government to adhere to the first course, such threats would have little chance of success if there was increasing provocation on our part. I understand that the Church must not muzzle itself through fear of consequences; it must, on the contrary, denounce and condemn evil wherever it occurs. But that is the duty of the hierarchy and of those whom it mandates. If the Assumptionists have, for the present, another assignment, namely the Moscow mission, incompatible with that of attacking Soviet persecution, they must leave that to others. Not only are they not asked to undertake this denunciation, but they cannot undertake it except with extreme caution. While your long stay in Moscow renders you exceptionally qualified to reveal Soviet cunning and malice, you being a predecessor to the present incumbent [Father Laberge] and of the same
religious family creates a dangerous situation. . . . With due respect for your opinion (which, I must tell you again, cannot be based anymore on possession of all the pertinent information), I must say that I am worried lest your talks be the greatest obstacle to the success of our present endeavors. And I am sure they would jeopardize them completely if you increased your schedule and had recourse to publicity.\textsuperscript{186}

Dufault suspected that Braun “remained deeply convinced that you had a mission to fulfill (despite the absence of a mandate, and the evidence above to the contrary, that you felt you were misunderstood by your superiors).” He asked Braun, however, if the attractions of public appearances “might be detaching you imperceptibly from your religious family?” He warned that “no one is safe, altogether safe, from illusion where he is thus personally concerned.” In view of these considerations, Dufault ordered Braun to “accept another occupation as your principal one.”\textsuperscript{187} Thus, by September 1949 the “muzzling” of Father Braun had become an accomplished fact.

Over the next two years Braun’s lack of mandate to publish and speak publicly was periodically reviewed. In October 1950 the Holy See instructed Braun “to desist from any public appearances and pronouncements against Communism”—in effect, a reaffirmation of the existing Vatican policy.\textsuperscript{188}

In May 1951 the Assumptionists revisited the Braun problem again, this time in a meeting of Dufault, Moquin, Armanet, and the attorney Michael Francis Doyle. Three of the principals—Moquin, Armanet, and Doyle—believed that no matter what they did with respect to Braun, it would “not jeopardize the Moscow mission, that Stalin will do as he sees fit regardless.” Dufault alone fretted that the Soviets “could still retaliate” against the current Assumptionist chaplain, Father Louis Brassard, by “trumping up a charge.” “Why would [they] not think of exercising vengeance on Fr. Brass[ard] if Fr. Braun provokes them enough?”\textsuperscript{189} A month later, on 11 June 1951, Doyle visited the Vatican secretariat of state, where Monsignor Tardini informed him that restrictions on Father Braun “were no longer necessary.” Tardini told Doyle that “Father Braun has acted very well under the circumstances, but now all the world knows Communism and what it leads to, and there is no longer any reason for restraint—but he [Tardini] depends on his [Braun’s] discretion. The same goes for writing.”\textsuperscript{190}

One might have thought that the Vatican decision of June 1951 to lift the restrictions on Braun would have paved the way for eventual publication of his memoirs. Braun himself certainly concluded that he could finally speak his mind, for he immediately set about rewriting his manuscript. However, powerful figures in the Assumptionist order were not enthusiastic about Braun’s proj-
ect. The superior general, Gervais Quénard, cautioned Dufault in August 1951:
“The word from the Vatican conveyed by Mr. Doyle has no importance, in our
judgment. The father [Braun] may certainly speak with greater liberty, but it will
be better not to unleash him [mais mieux vaut ne pas le déchaîner].”191 In March
1952 Quénard ordered Braun to get approval from the apostolic delegate in
Washington and from Father Crescent Armanet before publishing on religion
in the Soviet Union. According to a memorandum by Father Dufault, Braun
was “violently agitated” [a été bouleversé] by this decision favoring “censorship.”
He complained that he should not have to seek approval of the apostolic dele-
gate before publishing. Moreover, Braun felt that the decision requiring approval
from Armanet was a stratagem by Quénard to control critical remarks that Braun
might make concerning the conduct of French diplomats and churchmen in
the Soviet Union. Braun did not hide from Dufault his intention to tell the whole
truth, including the truth concerning mistakes by the French. This honest expres-
sion by Braun appalled Dufault, who wrote, “This indicates that he [Braun] in-
tends to recount these unhappy incidents; I don’t see how that will help fight
Communism, and I find it deplorable that a priest would deliberately give the
impression of rancor and seeking vengeance.”192 Dufault, however, did not com-
municate his misgivings to Braun.

By spring 1953 Braun had finished enough of the second variant of his mem-
oirs to approach a publisher. He sent the manuscript to McCall’s, which offered
to buy the North American magazine rights. However, before signing the con-
tract, he sought permission to publish from the Vatican through Father Dufault,
who in 1952 had become superior general of the Assumptionist order. On
5 May 1953, Dufault wrote Braun from Rome, “Monsignor T[ardini] feels that
this is not the time to publish . . . The Soviets are making a few moves toward
peace. We do not believe they have changed, added Monsignor, but if we attack
them in this manner now, they will surely turn the attack against the church
saying ‘we do not want peace,’ etc. Hence the reply of the Secretariat of State is:
“dilata.” And Monsignor T[ardini] would not further say whether I could give
you a hopeful word for the near future.”193

A year later, on 28 November 1954, Father Kokel of the Holy Curia recorded
conditions “laid down by the Holy See” for the publication of Father Braun’s
memoirs. According to this curial document, the “definitive test” for publica-
tion was that Braun’s manuscript “serve to alert public opinion to the true face
of Communism” while avoiding to the extent possible any damage to the As-
sumptionist presence in Moscow. In so doing, Braun would have to delete any-
thing that might be a pretext for Soviet reprisal, particularly any reference to the
general diplomatic situation or to individuals not directly involved in ministry

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on behalf of Russian Catholics. The document specified that Braun’s superiors should edit the memoirs “in conformity with the above criteria.” It is not difficult to see Father Dufault’s hand behind this curial decree, for the document conformed to his views of the Braun case—namely, that Braun restrict his comments to the evils of Communism, give the Soviets no pretext for reprisals against the Assumptionists, and avoid critical references to the general diplomatic situation or to errant individuals. To guarantee that the manuscript conform to these views, Dufault had supported prior censorship of Braun’s writings by the order. In 1954 Dufaut, as superior general of the order, was in a position to enforce his will on Braun through Rome.

Between 1959 and 1961 Braun campaigned to lift the restrictions on the publication of his memoirs. In a letter to Superior General Dufault on 25 January 1959, Braun wrote that “if ever I did receive not only the authorization of my superiors, but also their expressed desire, oral or written, for me to put down in writing and publish some of my experiences, I would be prepared to undertake this task with still some enthusiasm not yet shattered by the discouraging attempt of 1953.” Braun declared that “Assumptionists have no reason . . . to cover up in silence what their priests have accomplished in that land of tragedy when militant atheism up until 1943 was strangling churchmen and the faithful to the point of agony it has now reached.” He promised Dufault he would remember “there are some facts that need better remain unsaid,” but he added that publishers employ libel lawyers “to avoid all legal entanglements”—not a remark that Dufault would have found sympathetic. On the curial restrictions of 1954, Braun was characteristically blunt: they “would result in an emasculated narration of twelve years of labor in Russia under conditions that no other single American Assumptionist experienced.”

Not until spring 1961 did Braun receive from his ecclesiastical superiors permission to publish his memoirs. Superior General Dufault proceeded with reluctance, still worrying about the possibility that “the Soviets, regardless of what discretion we use, will not miss a chance to expel the priest from Moscow [Father Louis Dion] whenever they feel they do not have too much to lose in retaliation.” But Dufault’s hand was forced by another Assumptionist, Father Henri Moquin, to whom Dufault turned as censor deputatus. Moquin wrote that Braun’s 1961 manuscript “had changed since the first versions of several years ago.” The personal criticisms were “less frequent,” and the political commentary was “sufficiently moderate to be admitted [to publication].” Moquin doubted that there would be significant negative response from the French or American diplomatic corps. His conclusion was that the manuscript could be published:
“imprimi potest.” Dufault “could not but approve . . . the new dispositions regarding Braun.”

In retrospect, the controversy over Braun’s memoirs strikes us as one of the countless tragic consequences of the Cold War. Braun saw his moral duty in telling the truth about the Soviet system and exposing the illusions of powerful politicians who had not wished to face that truth. He acknowledged that “there are some facts that need better remain unsaid,” but he believed with every fiber of his being that evil must be named as such. In his desire to face squarely “Soviet deceit,” there was the firm determination of an American patriot who wanted his fellow citizens “to become realistic [about the Soviet threat] to the point of enlightened awareness and preparedness.” He did not hesitate in early variants of his memoirs to label his ideological opponents in the United States with the acerbic epithets routinely used by the anti-Communist right. Reading between the lines of his memoirs, we divine that Braun saw no contradiction between his moral obligation as a Catholic priest and his patriotic duty as an American citizen: indeed, he apparently felt pride that, “as the only person who knows certain things,” he would be the one to reveal them to the world. Although Braun was a formidable man with many talents—he was a fine musician, a gifted linguist, a shrewd observer of Soviet reality, and a tenacious defender of his faith—he was, at bottom, a simple, uncomplicated soul. In Isaiah Berlin’s terms, Braun was a “hedgehog,” a person who knew one big thing, one mastering truth—namely, the deficiencies of Soviet Communism. After December 1945 his life centered on speaking that mastering truth. He became obsessed by it, as some self-styled truth tellers do. When his religious superiors prevented him from speaking, when they “muzzled” him, he became enraged and lashed out against them. He told Wilfrid Dufault that “prolonged silence will do nothing but favor the triumph of falsehood and universal deception.” He compared the Vatican’s policy toward the Soviet Union to Western appeasement of the Nazis—a “Munich policy of religious character.” Braun submitted to his superiors willingly, but against his own unitary character and conception of truth. Dufault was right to observe that Braun was not a “perfectly submissive religious,” not someone who could make obedience “his first priority.” Dufault was very likely wrong to suppose that obedience “will be to [Braun’s] own good,” for the obedience demanded of Braun—silence in the face of evil—felt to the simple priest like a contradiction both to his moral sensibility and to his American common sense.

For Dufault and the Assumptionist leadership, Braun was a complicated challenge. As a conservative order whose founder wanted his priests to “plant
the true cross” on Russian soil, the Assumptionists shared Braun’s repugnance for Communism. But the expression of that repugnance was limited by the ongoing mission in Moscow, by loyalty to the series of priests who succeeded Braun in the American embassy chaplaincy and at St. Louis des Français Church. The Assumptionist leadership never felt that Braun’s memoirs should be published if the cost of publication would complicate or endanger the lives of other Assumptionists. In fact, Dufault thought attacking Soviet persecution of religion “incompatible” with maintaining the Moscow mission. Even when his closest advisers told him that Braun “will not jeopardize the Moscow mission, that Stalin will do as he sees fit regardless,” Dufault fretted that the Soviets would “trump up a charge” against the resident Assumptionist or close the St. Louis des Français Church. Nor did the Assumptionist leadership accept Braun’s idea that his memoirs might possess a unique moral message, that its timely charge might explode the Soviet system or illusions about that system. For Dufault, the entire truth about Communism had already been written infallibly in the 1937 encyclical Divini Redemptoris, so Braun’s revelations could be nothing other than particular instantiations of an already clear truth. Curiously, it did not occur to Dufault that even papal encyclicals have an intellectual history: as the theologian Wim Rood has recently shown, Divini Redemptoris was influenced directly by two memoranda from the Assumptionist bishop Pie Neveu but also by Braun’s dispatches to Neveu in late 1936 to early 1937.200 In any case, Dufault trusted the laity “more and more to open the public’s eyes concerning the Soviets.” Besides, he permitted Braun to speak on condition of no publicity, so he could content himself that little or nothing would be lost by silencing Braun temporarily.

Dufault was clearheaded, confident of his own judgment and spiritual wisdom, self-possessed, and forceful: in any confrontation with the formidable Father Braun, Dufault would, by virtue of his personality and office, emerge victorious. He reminded Braun that Braun’s opinions “cannot be based anymore on the possession of all the pertinent information,” that Braun himself “lacked the proper perspective.” He warned Braun that the anti-Communist campaign might “detach [him] imperceptibly from [his] religious family.” He endlessly demanded obedience to superiors whose “known intentions alone infallibly convey God’s desires, even when you feel that some superiors are insufficiently aware of the dangers besetting our civilization and faith.” Dufault did not scruple to point to Braun’s personality flaws or to refer to his alleged mental instability. For Dufault, Braun was “irascible,” given to “violent agitation,” someone whose “nerves betray him,” a man whose anti-Communist “fervor” led beyond the bounds of propriety, a priest who gave “the impression of rancor and vengeance.” Like Gervais Quénard, Dufault thought it “better not to un-
leash [Braun].” In Dufault’s worldview, Braun would simply have to obey the orders of religious superiors, no matter how painful. “It is not this life but you that must change.”

Since Dufault was a conservative churchman with unquestioning respect for hierarchy, his “first and last question” was the attitude of the Holy See toward Braun’s activities. Again and again, Dufault sought to clarify a manifestly unclear Vatican policy toward Braun. Only once, in 1949, did it occur to Dufault that the Vatican might want to leave the matter of Braun’s speaking “entirely to us,” that the Holy See’s “reluctance to intervene might indicate willingness for us to adjust to the changing situation.” Although in 1947–48 Dufault probably sought to persuade the Vatican that Braun should have the widest latitude to act, consistent with the safety of Assumptionists in Moscow, by 1951 Dufault had grown more leery of Braun: he now looked for the Vatican to approve his own policy toward Braun. To the question of what the Vatican should advise, he had a ready-made answer—one finally imposed on Braun in the curial conditions of November 1954.

The Vatican’s attitude toward Braun was coldly instrumental. In 1947 Tardini advised Braun to prepare memoirs “so that this material will be ready for use at the opportune moment.” In 1948 Rome told Braun that the advantages of publication were “outweighed” by the danger of Soviet reprisals against the Assumptionists, but the Vatican nevertheless permitted Braun to publish “anonymously” and to speak privately. In 1949 Tardini instructed Braun that he must “neither write . . . nor speak.” In 1951 Tardini dropped all restrictions upon Braun, but just as abruptly, in May 1953, he reimposed them. For Tardini, the Church’s chief diplomat in this matter, Braun was a simple soldier, a pawn in the endless struggle with evil, to be disposed of as he and God willed.

Under Tardini, the Vatican pursued a general line of opposition to Communism as an ideology, basing that opposition on the grounds outlined in Divini Redemptoris.201 In 1949 the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office summarized points of Catholic opposition to Communism, declared that no faithful Catholic could, in conscience, be a member of a Communist Party, and banned Catholics from reading Communist Party literature or working for the Communist press. Yet this implacably firm Catholic opposition to Communism did not translate into a consistent policy of militant opposition to every move of the Soviet leadership. In fact, throughout the so-called period of confrontation between the Holy See and the Soviet Union (1928–58), the Vatican looked for signs that the Soviet Union might abandon or moderate its antireligious policies and seek a concordat with the Roman Church. Periodically, there were indirect contacts between the Holy See and Soviet authorities concerning preconditions for an
exchange of ambassadors. Between May 1942 and August 1944, for example, Stalin himself tried to lay groundwork for negotiations on Vatican recognition of the Soviet Union. For our purposes, the most interesting exchanges occurred between May 1947 and August 1950, when one of Braun’s successors at the St. Louis des Français Church, Father Jean de Matha Thomas, sought to find grounds for a possible modus vivendi between the Vatican and the Soviet Union. During the most delicate moments of this behind-the-scenes dialogue, it was not in the Vatican’s interest to provoke the Soviet leadership by actively denouncing its antireligious moves. Nor would it have been seemly for Monsignor Tardini to use a French Assumptionist, Father Thomas, to explore a concordat with the Soviet Union, while simultaneously using an American Assumptionist, Father Braun, to expose Soviet deceitfulness. Moreover, between 1945 and Stalin’s death in March 1953, the realm of conflicting but also mutual interests of the Holy See and the Soviet Union was no longer limited to the half million Catholics of the prewar period, but now extended to the tens of millions of Catholics in Eastern and Central Europe. This extended realm of struggle, as Andrea Riccardi has shown, forced the Vatican secretariat of state to alter its political tactics as circumstances shifted in one country or another. It would surely be unfair to characterize Vatican negotiations with the Soviet leadership and its temporizing over criticism of Soviet policies as an early phase of the Catholic religious rapprochement with Soviet power excoriated by Alexis Ulysses Floridi in his polemic exposé in the 1970s. And yet there was in Vatican policy, as Wim Rood has noted, “wishful thinking” about better relations with the Soviets. The burden of translating into practical policy the Vatican Weltanschauung of opposition to Communist ideology and its practical desire to protect Catholics, bodily and spiritually, from Communist governments—that burden was beyond the capacity of any man to carry. Hence, we should not be surprised at Tardini’s appalling treatment of Father Braun or his dismissal of Braun’s memoirs as “untimely.” During the Cold War, far worse deeds were done.

Notes


4. Vailhé, tome 2, 671.


8. Tolstoi was the author of a two-volume monograph on Catholicism within Russia. Dmitrii Andreievich Tolstoi, Rimskii katolitsizm v Rossii: Istorichesko iseledovanie, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo V. F. Demakova, 1876). In Dostoevski’s last great novel, The Brothers Karamazov, the ideological antagonist to Russian Orthodoxy was the Grand Inquisitor.


11. Father Croghan has noted that among the Assumptionists in Russia a sense of autonomy, based on knowledge of local circumstances, quickly developed; meanwhile, the superior general, Father Emmanuel Bailly, grew increasingly frustrated at his inability to exert the accustomed discipline over his priests. Thus, in 1907 Bailly attempted to move Father Pie Neveu from Makeyevka in the Donets Basin to Odessa, but for a variety of reasons Neveu was bound to stay in Makeyevka. Again, in 1910 the overwrought Bailly decided to recall all the Assumptionists from Russia on the ground of their “spirit of rebellion and disobedience.” Under pressure from French people in Odessa, Bishop Kessler in the Tiraspol diocese, and other Assumptionists, Father Bailly suspended the recall but did not rescind it. Croghan, The Peasant from Makeyevka, 9–10, 20–21.

12. The characterization of Church relations comes from Igor Smolitsch, Die Geschichte der russischen Kirche, Band 2 (Berlin: Osteuropa-Institut Berlin, 1991), 347.


INTRODUCTION


17. V. I. Lenin, Materializm i empiriokrititsizm. Kriticheskie zametki ob odnoi reaktsii filosofii, in Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, tom 18, 364.


25. For a short account of these developments, see Richard Pipes, Russia Under the Bolshevist Regime (New York: Knopf, 1993), 346–59.

26. On Cieplak and the 1923 show trial, see Zatko, Descent into Darkness, 139–70.

27. At a meeting on 30 Jan. 1923 the Antireligious Commission set 23 March as the date it wished the patriarch’s trial to conclude. A month later, on 27 Feb. 1923, the police liaison to the commission, Iakov Solomonovich Argunov, reminded the commission that the Cieplak trial should reach a verdict before the beginning of the patriarch’s trial. See “Predislovie,” Politburo i tserkov’, 87. In April 1923 the Antireligious Commission and the Bolshevist Politburo approved not only the trial of Tikhon but also the application of the death penalty to his case. However, after pressure from Commissar for Foreign Affairs G. V. Chicherin and secret police chairman F. E. Dzerzhinskii, the Politburo reversed itself. On 27 June 1923 Patriarch Tikhon was released from house arrest. Ibid., 90–95.


32. Ibid., 61.

33. Peris, Storming the Heavens, 61, 97.

34. Croghan, The Peasant from Makeyevka, 75.

35. Ibid., 104–5.

36. Ibid., 119.


40. Cited in Peris, Storming the Heavens, 77.


42. See the decree of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR, 24 Sept. 1929.


44. Ibid., 266.

45. Ibid., 268.


47. Letter from Maxim Litvinov to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 16 Nov. 1933, in Browder, The Origins of Soviet-American Diplomacy, 231–34.

48. See Peter G. Filene, Americans and the Soviet Experiment 1917–1933 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 262–63. In neither case was the attitude toward recognition monolithic. Among Protestants, opinions were divided. Most Catholic publications opposed recognition, but Roosevelt’s political rival, the former governor of New York, Al Smith, favored it.


I N T R O D U C T I O N


57. Farnsworth, William C. Bullitt and the Soviet Union, 13, 44–45.

58. The diplomat Charles Bohlen accused Davies of sublime ignorance of elementary Soviet realities: “He took the Soviet line on everything except issues between the two governments.” Charles E. Bohlen, Witness to History: 1929–1969 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 44–45. Kennan’s assessment of Davies was acerbic and devastating, particularly on the ambassador’s superficial assessment of the Radek purge trial in 1937. See Kennan, Memoirs, 82–83. A recent effort to rehabilitate Davies’s reputation as a diplomat starts from the assumption that “although Davies detested communism, he was a progressive, who sympathized with the professed long-range goals of communism for improving the human condition.” See Elizabeth Kimball MacLean, Joseph E. Davies: Envoy to the Soviets (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992), 25.


60. Croghan, The Peasant from Makeyevka, 236.


63. Ibid., 126.

64. Letter from Braun to Fr. Ernest Baudouy, dated feast of St. Thomas de Villeneuve (Sept.) 1936, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, CL 2DZ, no. 70.


67. Ibid., 41.

68. Ibid., 117.


74. Letter from Braun to Pie Neveu, 1 June 1937, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, CL 2DZ, no. 84.
75. Braun, “Twelve Russian Years to Remember,” 254.
76. Ibid.
81. Curiously, during this dramatic encounter in Moscow, Monsignor Filippo Giobbe, instructed him to make three copies of the baptismal registry: one for Rome, a second to be held in the French embassy out of the police’s reach, and a third copy of each baptismal record to be given to each baptized Catholic. Braun brushed off this last stipulation. He told Neveu, “Remitting a copy to the baptized, I find, would expose poor people to unnecessary risks and perils. The poor peasants are capable in their ignorance of taking the certificates to the civil registry [ZAGS] and of being accused of trying to use [religious] documents for civil purposes. I think you [Neveu] will share this opinion and will explain to Filippo [Giobbe] that the contemplated step presents grave complications.” Letter from Braun to Pie Neveu, 24 Aug. 1937, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, no registration number, p. 2. Although Neveu did as Braun asked, Giobbe nevertheless insisted that Braun supply a copy of the certificate to the baptized. Braun responded by a small deception. He told Giobbe “bene benissime” but persisted in holding back the records. Letter from Braun to Pie Neveu, 27 Sept. 1937, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, no registration number, p. 2.
82. Letter from Braun to Ernest Baudouy and Antonin Coggia, 6 Sept. 1937, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, CL 2 DZ, no. 91.
83. Letter from Braun to Pie Neveu, 24 Jan. 1938, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, no registration number, p. 2. Malinovskaia had served Braun as a courier, carrying money to priests and parishioners operating clandestinely elsewhere in the USSR.
84. Letter from Braun to Pie Neveu, 8 March 1938, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, no registration number, p. 1.
89. Ibid., 274–75.
90. Letter from Braun to Ernest Baudouy, 22 Sept. 1936, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, CL 2 DZ, no. 70.
96. Letter from Braun to Ernest Baudouy and Antonin Coggia, 29 Nov. 1937, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, CL 2DZ, no. 97.
98. Letter from Braun to Ernest Baudouy and Antonin Coggia, 19 April 1937, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, CL 2DZ, no. 81.
100. Braun, "Twelve Russian Years to Remember," 362.
102. Letter from Braun to Pie Neveu, 6 April 1937, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, no registration number, p. 4.
103. Braun, "Twelve Russian Years to Remember," 363.
104. Zhiromskaia, Kiselev, Poliakov, Polveka pod grifom sekretno, 98–101. Among the believers, 75 percent, or 41 million citizens, were Orthodox; roughly 15 percent, or more than 8 million citizens, were Muslims. Only 480,000, or 0.8 percent of the believers, were Catholic.
105. Letter from Braun to Filippo Giobbe, 7 April 1937, Archivio dei Padri Assunzionisti, Roma, no registration number, p. 3.
106. Braun, "Twelve Russian Years to Remember," 402.
107. Ibid., 374–75.
110. Ibid., 406.
111. Ibid., 406–8.
112. Ibid., 415.
113. Ibid., 423–24.
115. Ibid., 378.
116. Ibid., 381.
117. Ibid., 382–83. See Metropolitan Nikolai (Iarusheivich), et al., Pravda o religii Rossii (Moscow: Moskovskaja Patriarkhiia, 1942). According to Braun, the first copies of the book were printed as a “vypusk iz antireligioznoi pechati SSSR [offprint of the antireligious press of the USSR].” This “technical error” led to the confiscation of the original run and the attribution of the book to the Moscow patriarchate. The problem with the latter attribution was that the Moscow patriarchate was not restored until Sept. 1943, more than a year after the book’s release.

118. Ibid., 383.


120. Ibid., 457.

121. Ibid., 428.


124. See Croghan, “Twenty-Five Difficult Years,” 19–20. According to Croghan, “On his return to the US, Mr. Flynn reported that Fr. Braun was narrow-minded, had fixed ideas and should be recalled and Fr. Armanet was summoned by Cardinal Spellman and informed of these findings. Fr. Armanet wrote to Fr. Quénard on April 27, 1945, to make him aware of the situation.”


129. Ibid., 395.

130. Ibid., 399.


132. English translation of Kniazev’s deposition to the People’s Tribunal of the Lenin District, in Correspondence/Notes—Father Braun, 2 Nov. 1944, Assumptionist Archives, Boston.

133. Correspondence/Notes—Father Braun, Formal Declaration of 30 June 1945, Assumptionist Archives, Boston.


135. In his memoirs, Braun wrote, “I do not remember how many times I was told by Russians who had gone through NKVD questioning on my account, that I would never
get out of the country alive. I knew too much.” In Nov. 1945 a young lady rushed into his apartment to say, “Father, don’t take that plane.” Braun did not disclose the warning to a single soul. See Braun, “Twelve Russian Years to Remember,” 466–68.

136. In a phone interview with Father Wilfrid Dufault in March 2003, I asked whether Braun was paranoid. Dufault answered, “Of course. He thought the Russians would kill him on the plane [in 1945].” In casual conversation with other Assumptionists in the same month, I asked the same question. Father Richard Richards, who met Braun several years after the war, told me he suspected Braun was paranoid and said Braun had “never recovered” from the Moscow mission. In his obituary for Braun, Father Richards called Braun “this turbulent man with a violent temper.” Richards noted that the unrelenting pressure from the Soviets “started to tell on Braun, who was never patient or peaceful.” See “As It Was: Father Léopold Braun, A.A., 1904–1964,” *Assumptionists* (April–May–June 2002): 34–35.

137. The trips to South America and the Caribbean were mentioned in a letter from Father Wilfrid G. Dufault to Léopold Braun, 7 Sept. 1949. “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston, p. 3.

138. The first variant, untitled, can be found in Assumptionist Archives, Boston, “1948 Manuscript. Father Braun.” The pagination is irregular; there are handwritten corrections in Braun’s hand. In a letter to Wilfrid Dufault on 26 July 1948, Braun declared that he had written “more than 140,000 words,” and promised, “I will finish with two or three more chapters.” See “Principal Papers of Fr. Braun After Moscow,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston. Bullitt must have read this version of the manuscript, because he returned it to Braun on 30 Oct. 1948, “minus the preliminary notice, foreword and chapter 1.” See letter from Léopold Braun to William C. Bullitt, 1 Nov. 1948, in “1953 Manuscript, Braun,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston. This letter is apparently misfiled.


140. See the note in “1953 Manuscript, Braun,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston.

141. There is a memorandum by Father Wilfrid G. Dufault titled “For the Record” in which the procedure for ecclesiastic censorship of the ongoing manuscript is discussed. See “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” 8 March 1952, Assumptionist Archives, Boston.

142. On the review of the manuscript by the Assumptionists, see Wilfrid Dufault to Henri M[ochquin], letter of 12 March 1961, “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston, and letter of 26 April 1961 from anonymous (probably Henri Moquin) to Wilfrid Dufault, “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow.” The reference to Regnery is in “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” letter from Wilfrid Dufault to [no addressee indicated], 29 April 1961, Assumptionist Archives, Boston.

144. Ibid., 86.

145. Ibid., 140–41.

146. Ibid., 171.

147. Ibid., 173.

148. Ibid., 185–86.

149. Ibid., 186.

150. Ibid., 86.

151. Ibid., 190.

152. Ibid., 209.

153. Ibid., 178.


155. Unlike some historians, I do not think that memoirists necessarily reveal their political views in the process of recording their lives. And not infrequently the writing of memoirs obscures more than it reveals of the author’s life. In an essay on Gertrude Stein, Janet Malcolm has complained that Stein’s voluminous autobiographical writings are characterized by “evasiveness about her Jewishness.” In Wars I Have Seen, Malcolm notes, “Stein continues to leave out the essential.” See Janet Malcolm, “Gertrude Stein’s War. The Years in Occupied France,” The New Yorker, 2 June 2003, 58–81, here 75–76. For Stein’s memoirs see Wars I Have Seen (New York: Random House, 1945).


157. Ibid., 415–18.

158. Ibid., 459.

159. Ibid., 454. The book in question was translated into English by Rev. E. N. C. Sergeant, under the title The Truth About Religion in Russia (New York: Hutchinson, 1944); the original may be found under Russkaia pravoslavnaiia tservkov’, Moskovskaiia patriarkhiia, Pravda o religii v Rossii (Moscow: Moskovskaiia Patriarkhiia, 1942).

160. See Margaret Bourke-White, Shooting the Russian War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942).


162. Ibid., 228.


164. See letter of Wilfrid Dufault to Léopold Braun, 7 Sept. 1949, “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston, 3: “After your return from trips to Columbia and to Cuba, you were left free to spend most of your time writing your memoirs.”
165. See letter from Wilfrid Dufault to Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, 30 Sept. 1947, “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston, 1.

166. See letter from Wilfrid Dufault to Léopold Braun, 9 Oct. 1947, “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston, 1.


169. Letter from Amleto Giovanni Cicognani to Wilfrid Dufault, 17 Dec. 1947, “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston. Cicognani quoted Tardini as follows: “Although, on the one hand, it would be very useful to permit Father Braun to draw upon his vast experience and wide knowledge to expose truthfully and justly what he knows of the situation in Russia, on the other hand, it must not be forgotten that there are presently two priests in Moscow [Fathers Laberge and Thomas] and it is necessary that their apostolate be neither interrupted nor impeded in any way. This situation demands that Father Braun’s findings are not made public at the present time.”


171. Letter from Braun to Wilfrid Dufault, 26 July 1948, “Principal Papers of Father Braun After Moscow,” Assumptionist Archives, Boston.


178. Ibid., 2.

179. Ibid., 3–4.
180. Ibid., 4.
183. Oral interview with Wilfrid Dufault, March 2003. Father Dufault did not give the date of this incident, but specified the subject: Braun’s anger over his silencing.
187. Ibid., 3.
191. Ibid.
192. Memorandum entitled “For the Record,” dated 8 March 1952, signed by Wilfrid Dufault, Assumptionist Archives, Boston.
196. Ibid., 1.
lxxxii  I  I N T R O D U C T I O N

201. Ibid., 156–57.